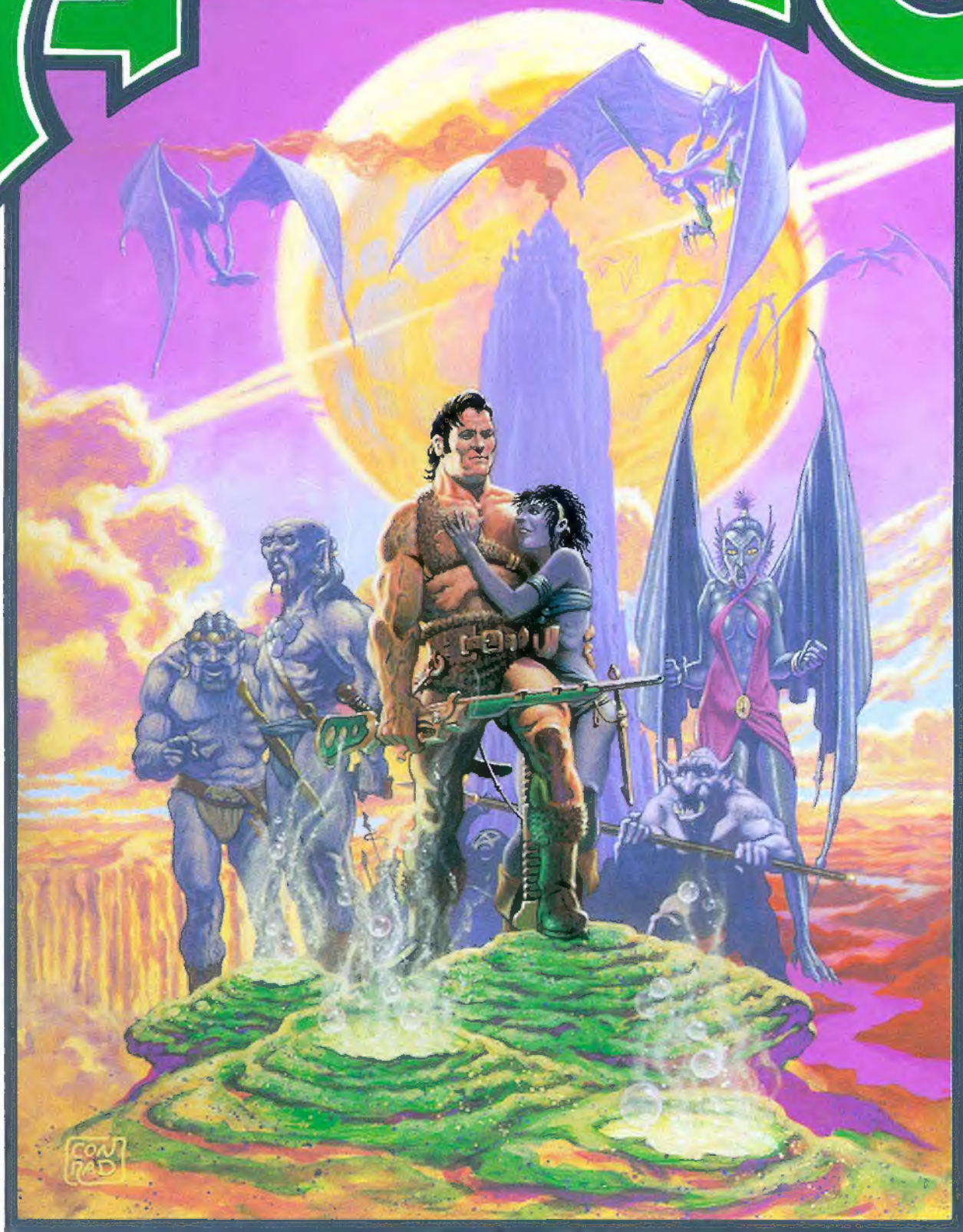
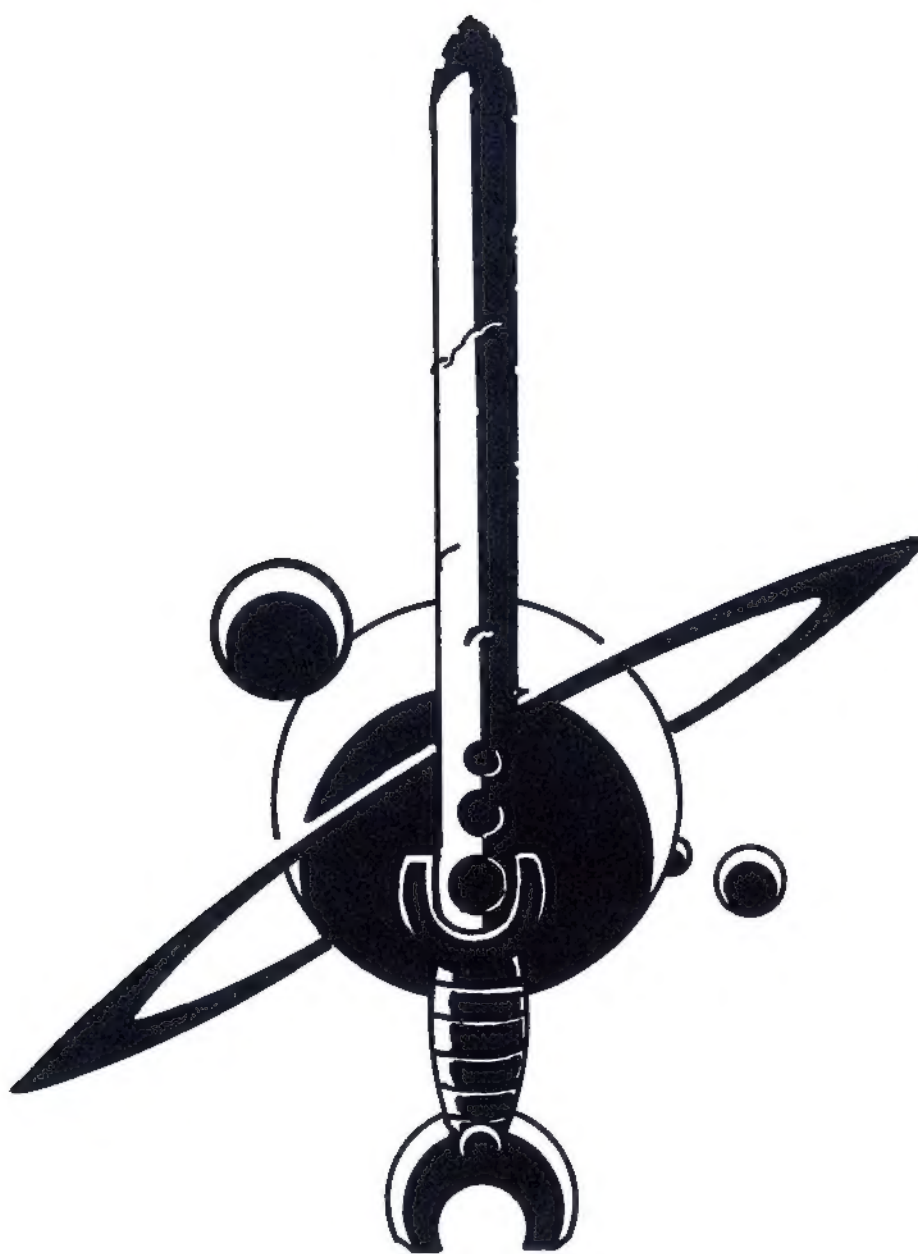


ALAMURIC



ROY THOMAS

TIM CONRAD



Special thanks to Marvel Comics and Michael Hobson
for their help with this project.

ALMURIC

Featuring an
adaptation of
the novel by
**Robert E.
Howard**



*From the dictaphone journal of Professor Avery Hildebrand, 1938:
It was not my original intention ever to divulge the whereabouts of
Esau Cairn or the mystery surrounding him. However, the peculiar
circumstances of--no, let me begin again...*

*Let me state definitely and
flatly at the very outset
that Esau Cairn is not, and
never was, a criminal.*



*Moreover, I am certain
that, when the red haze
of fury faded and he
stood looking down at
the lifeless body that a
few seconds before had
been the all-powerful
"Boss" Blaine...*



*...his agony
was as real as
if the blow he
had struck
had, instead,
been struck
against him-
self.*



As sanity returned again to Esau Cairn, he realized that he could not hope to escape the vengeance of the political machine which still ruled the city, even though he himself had just cut off that machine's loathsome head.

No, it was not because of fear that he fled the poah, night-shrouded senatorial offices of the dead man.

It was simply a primitive impulse...

...some forgotten instinct buried deep within his atavistic brain...

...that led him to seek a more convenient place to turn at bay, and fight out his death fight.

...SUSPECT ABOUT 6'2"...
DARK HAIR...
VERY STRONG...
DANGEROUS...
SHOOT ON SIGHT...!

Many men are born outside their century; Esau Cairn was born outside his epoch.

He was of a restless mold, primal in his passions and with a gusty temper. Thus, his life was a series of unsuccessful attempts at repression.

Born in the Southwest, of old frontier stock, he came of a race whose traditions were those of war and feud and violence.

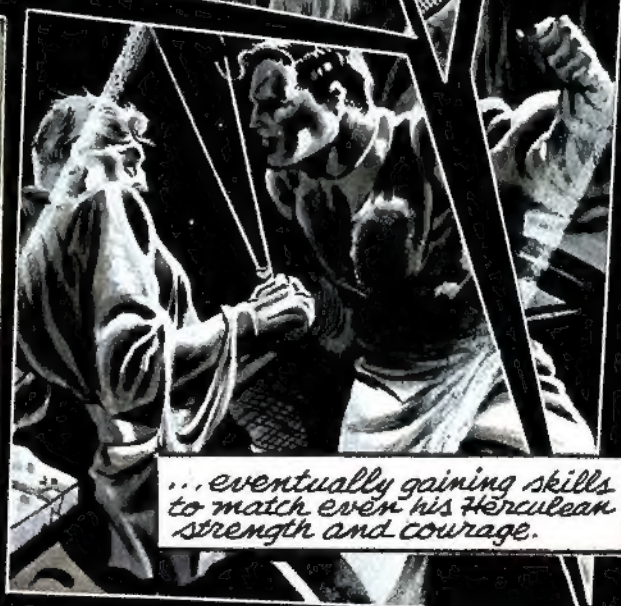
His college football days were cut short by the crippling injuries he inadvertently caused.

And his boxing career ended the same way, when he almost fatally injured a sparring partner.

His license revoked, he became a nameless wanderer...

...a soldier of fortune...

...eventually gaining skills to match even his Herculean strength and courage.



As for the reasons a corrupt senator appointed him to state office...well, the story was an old one.

He was intended to be an overgrown, stupid puppet... and "Boss" Blaine intended to pull all the strings.

But, though Cairn was big, he was neither a criminal...nor a fool.

YOU! YOU SET ME UP FOR THIS, BLAINE!

DAWKINS
GRAFT MOX
UNCOVERED

SO WHAT IF I DID?

SO YOU GO TO JAIL FOR A FEW YEARS! I'LL MAKE IT WORTH YOUR WHILE WHEN YOU GET OUT, AND--

YOU BASTARD! I'M NOT GOING TO JAIL FOR ANYBODY!

NO? THEN MAYBE YOU'LL SHOOT YOURSELF-- BECAUSE YOU COULDN'T STAND THE DISGRACE!

YEAH, I KINDA LIKE THAT...!

Pulling that gun wasn't "Boss" Blaine's first mistake--

--but it was his last.

And now, Esau Cairn was a fugitive...for the final time.



*He had
no plan.*



*He simply intended
to fortify himself
somewhere...*



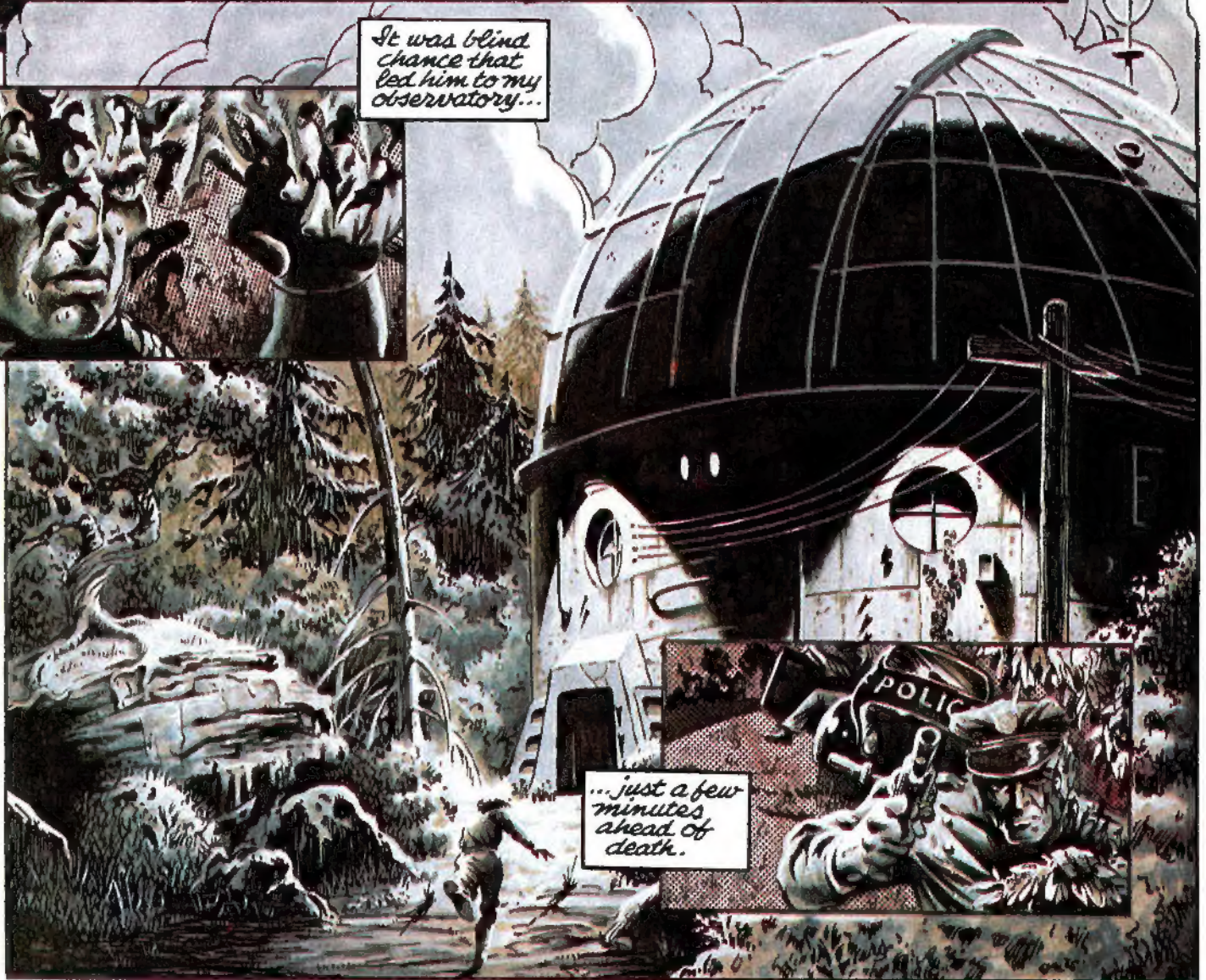
BLAM!

SCREEECH!

*...then fight it out with
the police until he was
riddled with lead.*



*It was blind
chance that
led him to my
observatory...*



*...just a few
minutes
ahead of
death.*





LET ME IN!

FOR GOD'S SAKE--
LET ME IN!



YES? WHAT IS IT
YOU WANT, MY
FRIEND?



TO DIE
LIKE A *MAN*--
NOT LIKE
A DOG!



A NOT UNREASON-
ABLE REQUEST,
MR. CAIRN.

OH YES, I
RECOGNIZED
YOU AT ONCE...
FROM THE
DESCRIPTION
ON THE POLICE
RADIO.



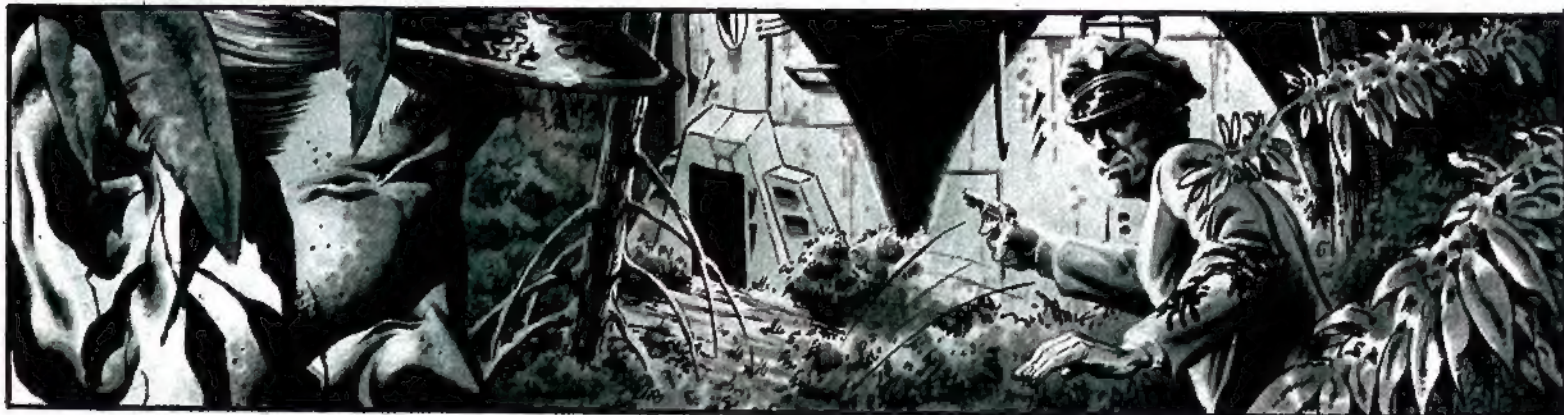
UP THOSE
STAIRS, IF
YOU WILL.



YOU'VE NO CHANCE IN THE COURTS
OF THIS STATE, OF COURSE.

"BOSS" BLAINE'S
REACH IS LONG...
EVEN FROM THE
GRAVE.

THUS, PERHAPS THE
TIME HAS COME TO
SHARE WITH SOMEONE...
WHAT I LIKE TO CALL
THE *GREAT SECRET*.





...SO THAT IS
YOUR CHOICE,
ESAU CAIRN:

LET ME TRANSPORT
YOU, BY MEANS I HAVE
ONLY RECENTLY DIS-
COVERED, TO THE
PLANET I HAVE NAMED
ALMURIC-- IN A
SOLAR SYSTEM FAR
FROM OUR OWN--



--OR STAND
PREPARED TO
FACE CERTAIN
DOOM, A FEW
SHORT
SECONDS
FROM NOW.



WELL?



I'M READY,
PROFESSOR!

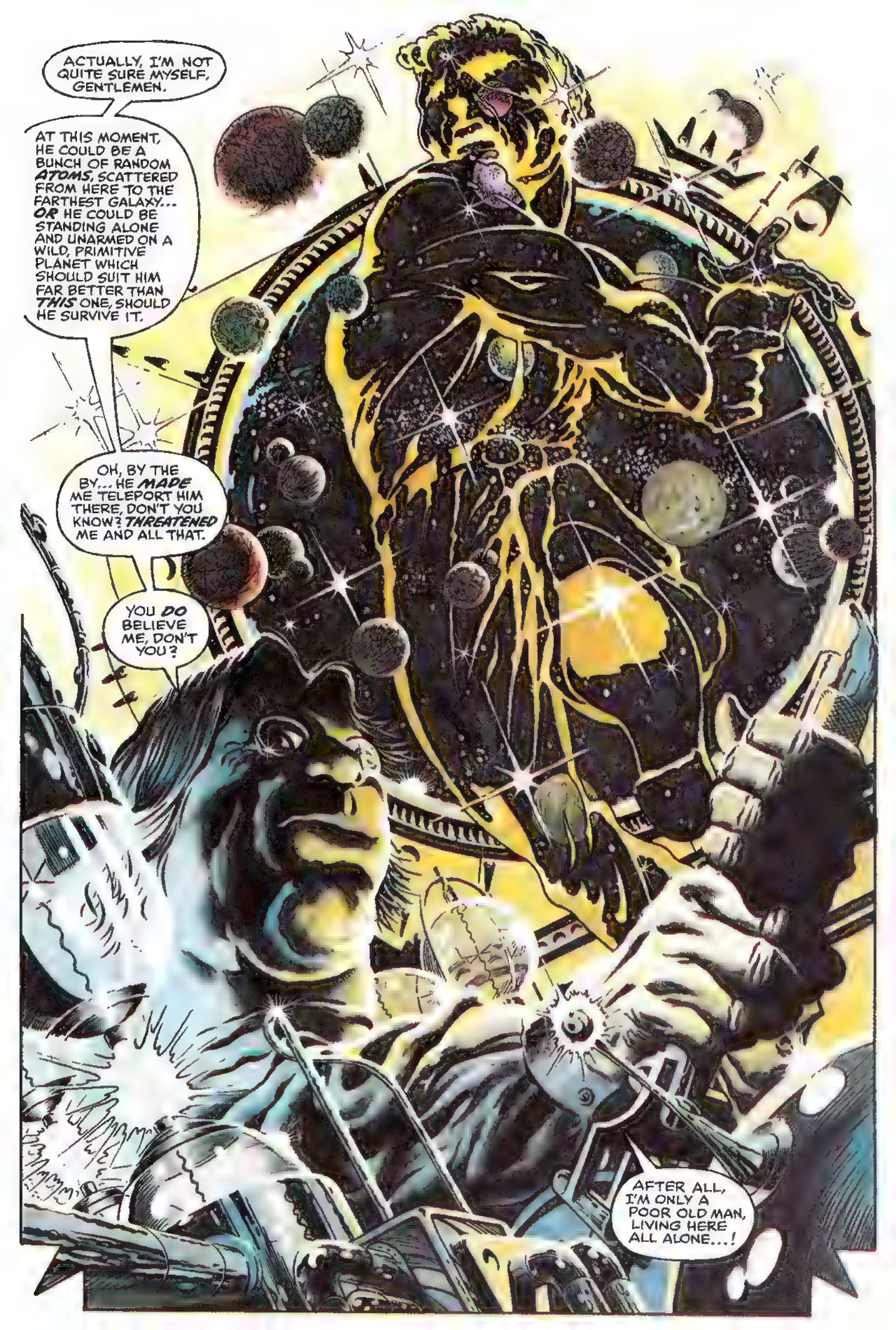
IN GOD'S
NAME--
HURRY!

HEY!
HOLD IT IN
THERE--!



WH-WHAT
THE
HELL--?

CAIRN'S
GONE!
BUT
WHERE--??



ACTUALLY, I'M NOT
QUITE SURE MYSELF,
GENTLEMEN.

AT THIS MOMENT,
HE COULD BE A
BUNCH OF RANDOM
ATOMS, SCATTERED
FROM HERE TO THE
FARTHEST GALAXY...
OR HE COULD BE
STANDING ALONE
AND UNARMED ON A
WILD, PRIMITIVE
PLANET WHICH
SHOULD SUIT HIM
FAR BETTER THAN
THIS ONE, SHOULD
HE SURVIVE IT.

OH, BY THE
BY... HE **MADE**
ME TELEPORT HIM
THERE, DON'T YOU
KNOW? **THREATENED**
ME AND ALL THAT.

YOU **DO**
BELIEVE
ME, DON'T
YOU?

AFTER ALL,
I'M ONLY A
POOR OLD MAN,
LIVING HERE
ALL ALONE...!

Even in this dictaphone journal, which is for no ears, save my own, I will not elaborate upon my great secret... not upon the means by which I later achieved communication with that unhappy fugitive, upon a world swimming dark in space... alien, aloof, strange.

Suffice it to say that, in time, I heard the story from his own lips, whispering eerily across the cosmos.

I write, from this point, in Esau Cairn's own words:

ESAU CAIRN'S NARRATIVE:

"The transition was so swift that it seemed less than a tick of time between the moment I placed myself in Professor Mitterrand's weird machine...

...and the instant when I found myself, standing upright in the clear sunlight that flooded a broad and somewhat unearthy plain.

"It is an awesome sensation to be suddenly hurled from one's native world into a strange, new alien sphere... and I, who had never known fear, felt for the first time that utter helplessness which other men know.

"At least it was no world of ice and snow, into which I had fallen, and the warmth of an unknown sun was pleasant on my bare limbs.

"Then, as I stood there gazing, I already heard from behind me the most unexpected sound of all...

"THAT! WHAT MANNER OF MAN ARE YOU?"

"A gruff, yet human voice—and, speaking in perfect English, or so it seemed to me at that moment!

"I whirled about—

"--to stare amazedly at the first inhabitant of Qlmuric I had ever encountered!

I AM...
ESAU
CAIRN.

BY THAK--
ARE YOU A
MAN OR A
WOMAN?

"My answer
was a smash
of my clenched
fist.

"Again my primi-
tive wrath had be-
trayed me... as,
with a scream of
bestial rage, the
least-man sprang
up at me, roaring
and frothing...

"...and I, who
had always had
to restrain my
strength, now
found myself
in the clutches
of a man
stronger than
myself!

"The fight, how-
ever, was short
and deadly, as
I desperately
broke free...

"...following one
mighty blow with
another...

"...so that he went down
like a slaughtered ox,
his jaw obviously broken.

"Then, from
out of
nowhere--
a spear--

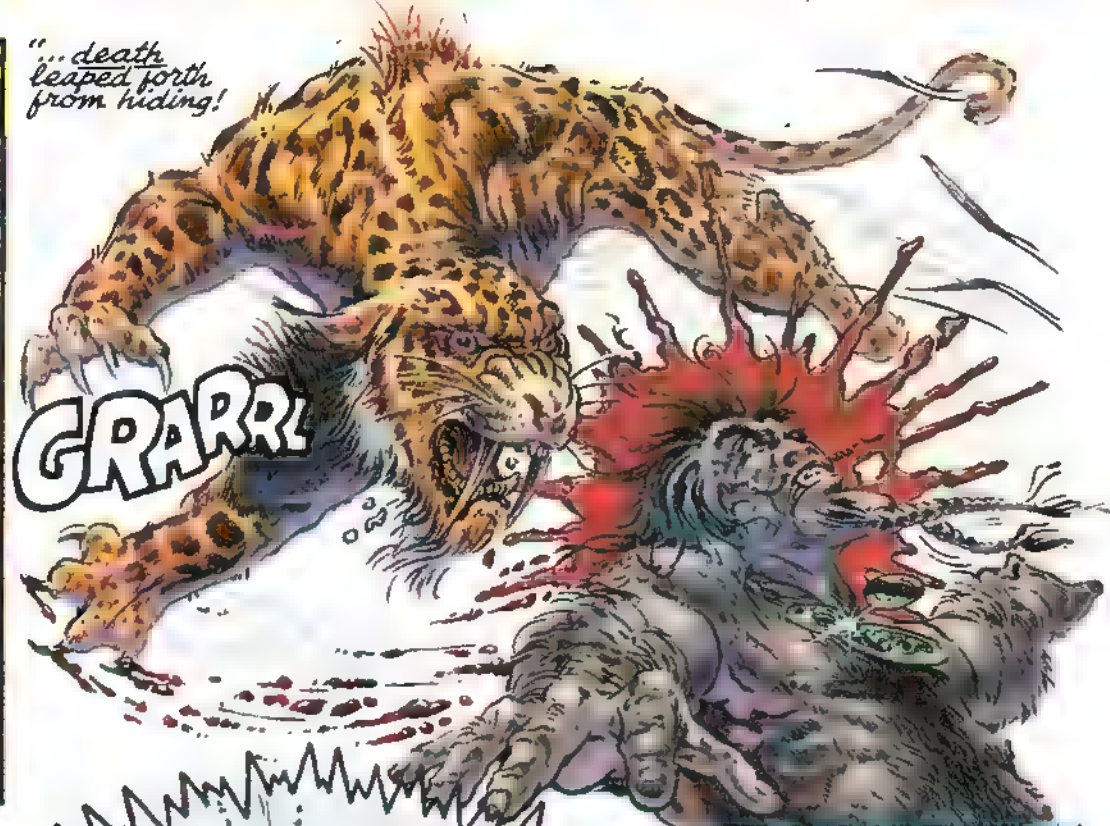
WHO--?

"But, even as I turned, to see armed beast-men charging madly toward me..."



"... death leaped forth from hiding!"

GRARR!



"Be it leopard, or tiger, or neither, the thing had inadvertently saved me from an enemy spear."

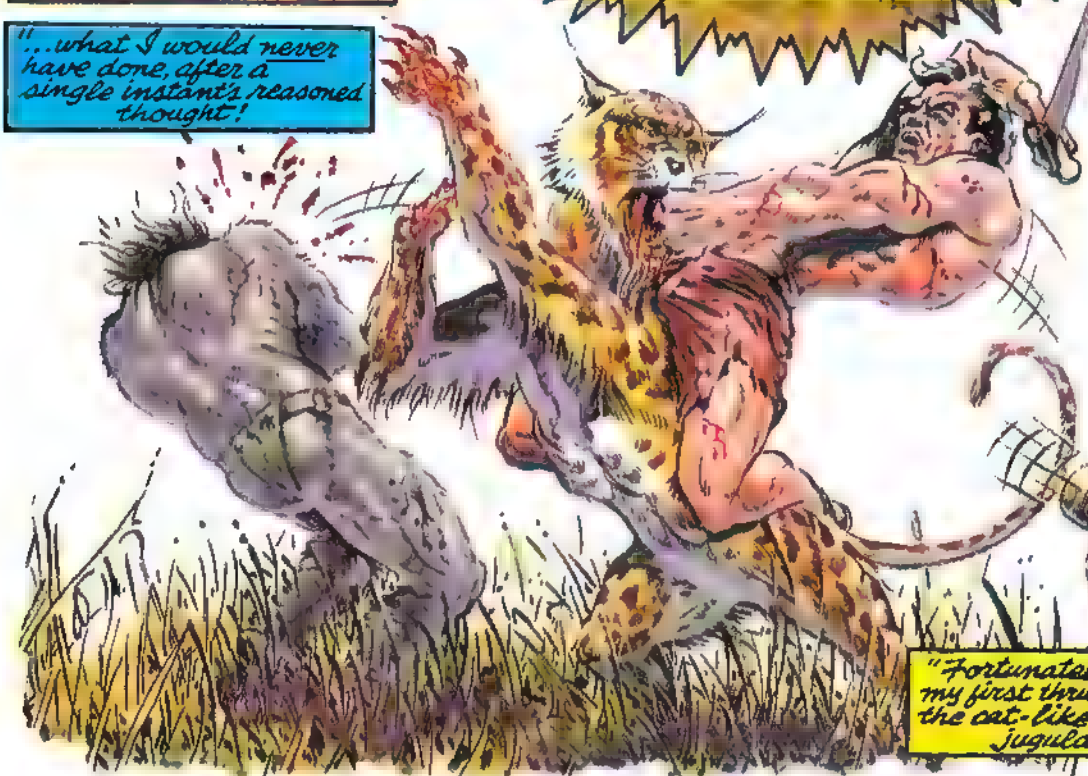


"And once again I did on instinct..."



"yet, something deep within me responded to my attacker's now-pitiful cries..."

"...what I would never have done, after a single instant's reasoned thought!"



"Fortunately for me, my first thrust struck the cat-like animal's jugular."



YOWR

"Only the beast-man whose jaw I had broken was alive, as I staggered to my feet..."



"And he stared ahead, wide-eyed with fear... of myself, I imagined."



"I was wrong."



"Two more such troglodytes had drawn near while we fought... from the opposite direction as the first group."

"And one of them held what seemed to be, astoundingly... a gun!"



WAIT!
I'M A
FRIEND!

MY
NAME IS
ESAU--

CLIK--

BLAM

"I knew
no more,
for a
time."



"When I came to my senses, it was not slowly, but quickly, and clear-headedly.

"My recuperative powers, I've learned are immense... though my bandaged head throbbled madly.

"I found I was chained to a thick metal ring set in the wall, and only strangely-cut green stone met my gaze on all sides, except for...

"...a window!"

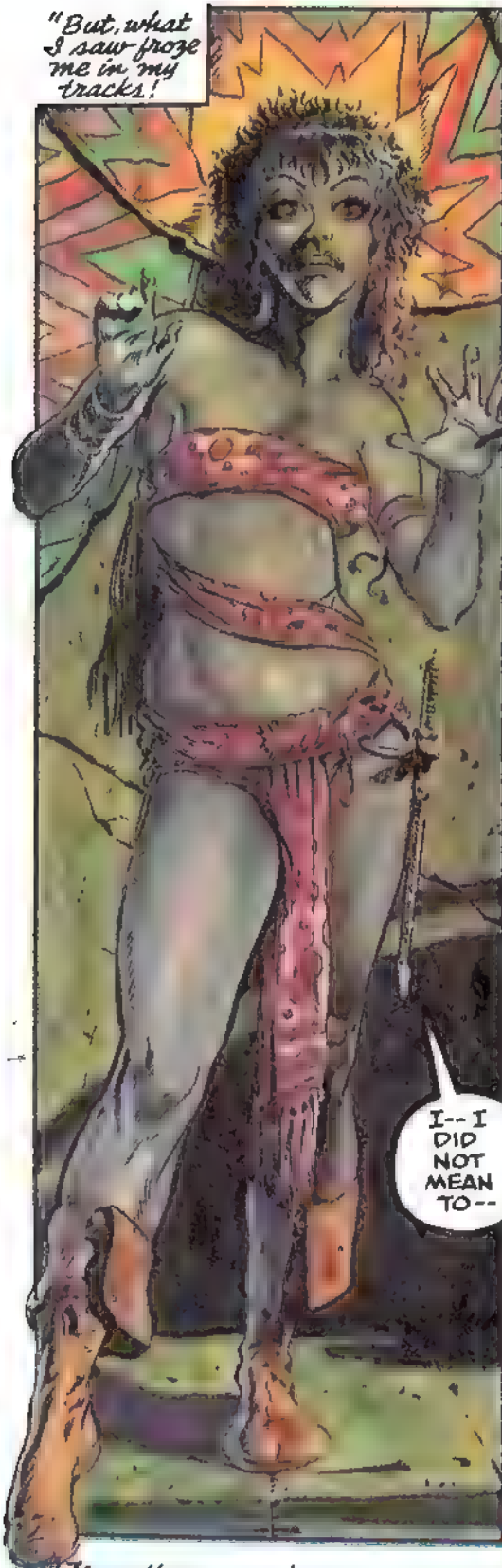
"And from it, even as I cursed my shackles, I beheld for the first time the city of my captors..."

"...and marvelled that hairy, rough-voiced beast-men could have built such a monolithic fortress, in the midst of that vast and grassy plain!"

"Just then, a slight noise caused me to wheel, snarling, my muscles tensed for attack or defense..."

WHO'S THERE?!

"But, what I saw froze me in my tracks!"



I-- I DID NOT MEAN TO--

OUT OF OUR WAY, BITCH!

OH--H--!

LOOK! THE HAIRLESS ONE IS CONSCIOUS.

HE'S FROM BEYOND THE GIRDLE, I TELL YOU.

FROM BEYOND MY ASS!

WELL, WHAT DO WE DO WITH HIM?

HIS HIDE WOULD MAKE GOOD LEATHER.

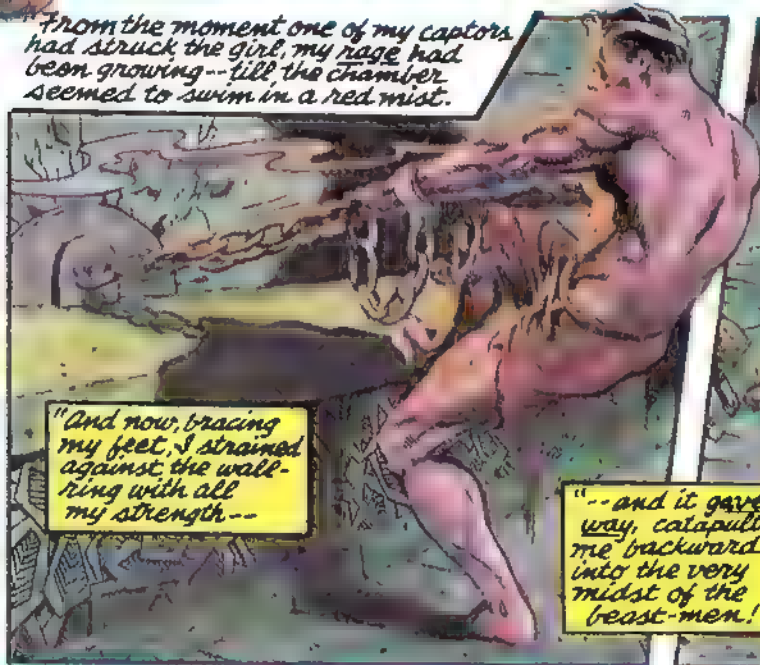
TOO SOFT!

I'LL SHOW YOU HOW TENDER HIS FLESH IS.



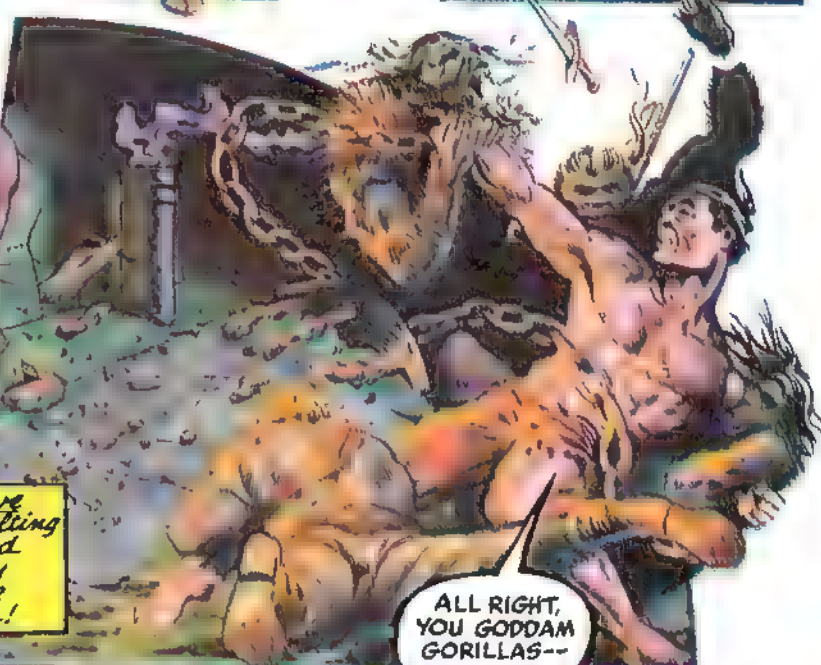
WATCH ME SLICE OFF A FEW STRIPS!

From the moment one of my captors had struck the girl, my rage had been growing--till the chamber seemed to swim in a red mist.



"And now, bracing my feet, I strained against the wall--ring with all my strength--

"--and it gave way, catapulting me backward into the very midst of the beast-men!



ALL RIGHT, YOU GODDAM GORILLAS--



LET'S SEE
HOW YOU
FARE AGAINST
A MAN!

"Oh, but that was a rough-house while it lasted! No brawl back on earth had ever tasted so sweet, and I'll wager I gave a good account of myself."

"But that damnable chain kept tripping me up, and already I was nearly blinded by blood streaming anew from my head-wound..."

"...so that, soon, I floundered and stumbled..."

"...and they bore me down."

HIS WOUND'S OPEN AGAIN! HE'LL BLEED TO DEATH.

LET HIM! I'M DYING! GIVE ME SOME WINE!

IF YOU'RE DYING, YOU DON'T NEED WINE!

AYE, I'LL TIE IT TIGHT--TIGHT ENOUGH TO--

KEEP AWAY FROM ME, YOU SMIRKING MONKEY, OR I'LL KILL YOU

THAT'S A PROMISE-- SO HELP ME GOD!

BIND UP HIS WOUND, AKRA.

ALMURIC

EPISODE TWO

ESAU CAIRN'S NARRATIVE

(AS TRANSCRIBED FROM THE DICTAPHONE JOURNAL OF PROF. AVERY HILDEBRAND, 1938)

"Let me tell of my battle with Ghor the Bear, strongest man of the city called Koch."

"For hours did it rage, there in the arena, as all time merged into a blind mist of tearing, snarling eternity... with neither man able to gain an advantage in our battle to the death."

"First he seemed to be winning, damn his hairy hide... then I... then he again"

ROY THOMAS - SCRIPT
TIM CONRAD - ART
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY
ROBERT E. HOWARD

"And as we fought, amid no sound now but our own panting gasps, I thought once more of how I came to be fighting for my very life on this God-forsaken planet called Almuric."

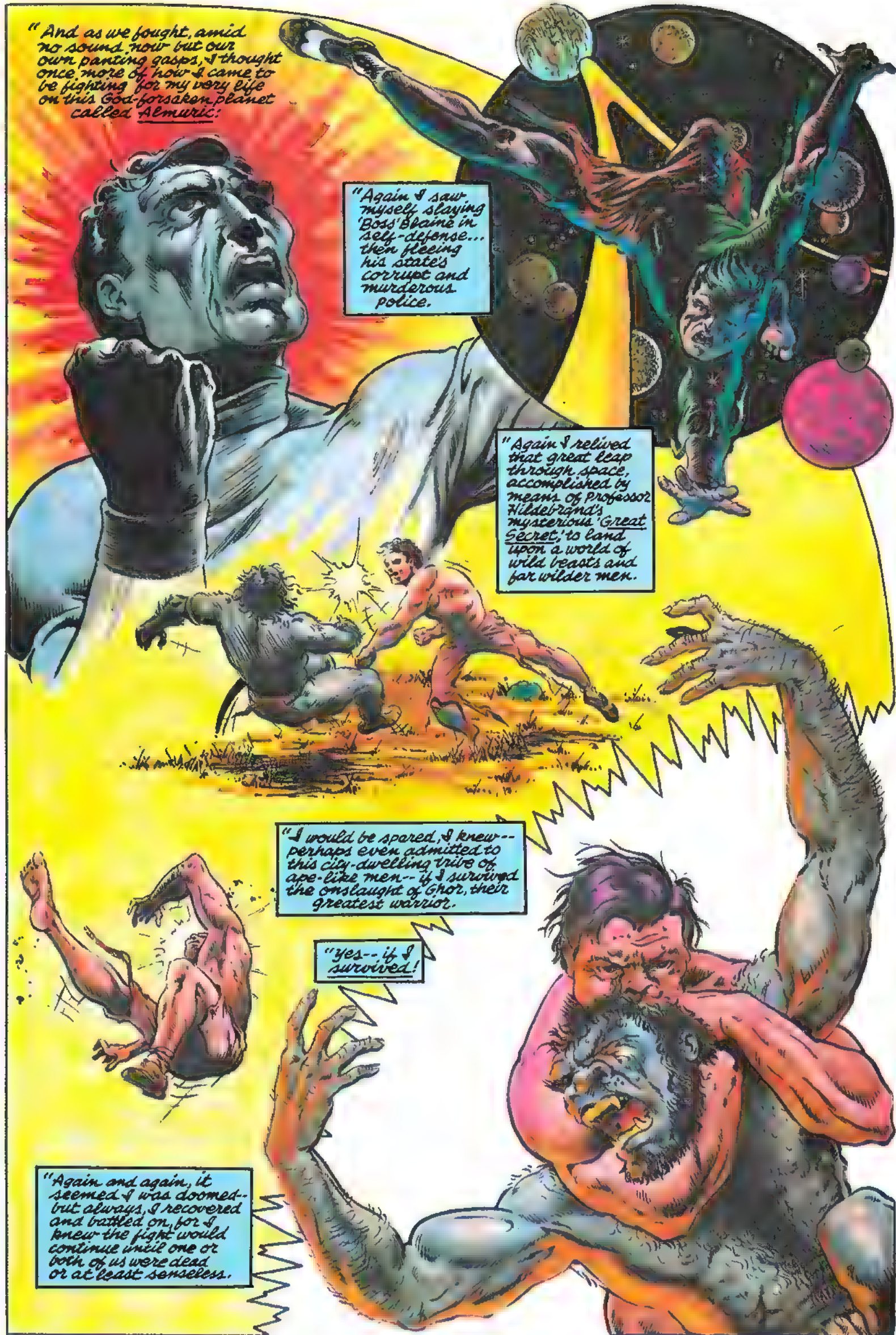
"Again I saw myself slaying 'Boss' Blaine in self-defense... then fleeing his state's corrupt and murderous police."

"Again I relived that great leap through space, accomplished by means of Professor Hildebrand's mysterious 'Great Secret,' to land upon a world of wild beasts and far wilder men."

"I would be spared, I knew-- perhaps even admitted to this city-dwelling tribe of ape-like men-- if I survived the onslaught of Ghor, their greatest warrior."

"yes-- if I survived!"

"Again and again, it seemed I was doomed-- but always, I recovered and battled on, for I knew the fight would continue until one or both of us were dead or at least senseless."



"The crowd were screaming for still more blood as I felled Ghor for what seemed the twentieth time..."

WELL, GHOR? DO YOU... SURRENDER...?



GHOR NEVER SURRENDERS... NEVER LOSES!



"yet, the very impetus of his bounding rush helped me..."

THAT'S DEVILS!



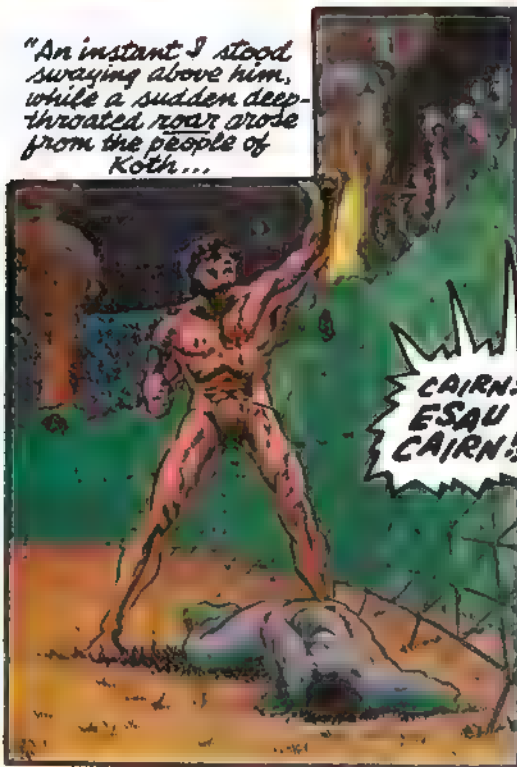
"...as I steelled my ebbing strength for one last effort..."



"...and sent my foeman crashing to earth!"

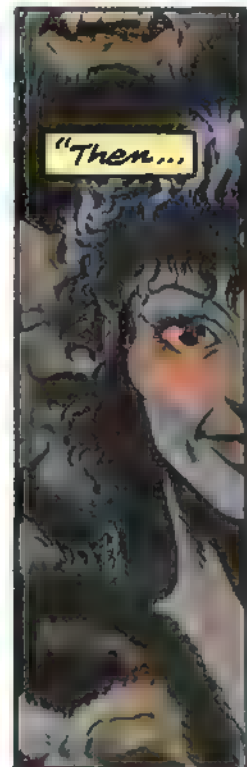


"An instant I stood swaying above him, while a sudden deep-throated roar arose from the people of Koth..."

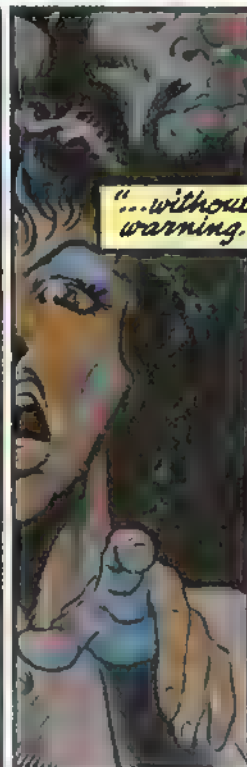


CAIRN! ESAU CAIRN!!

"Then..."



"...without warning..."



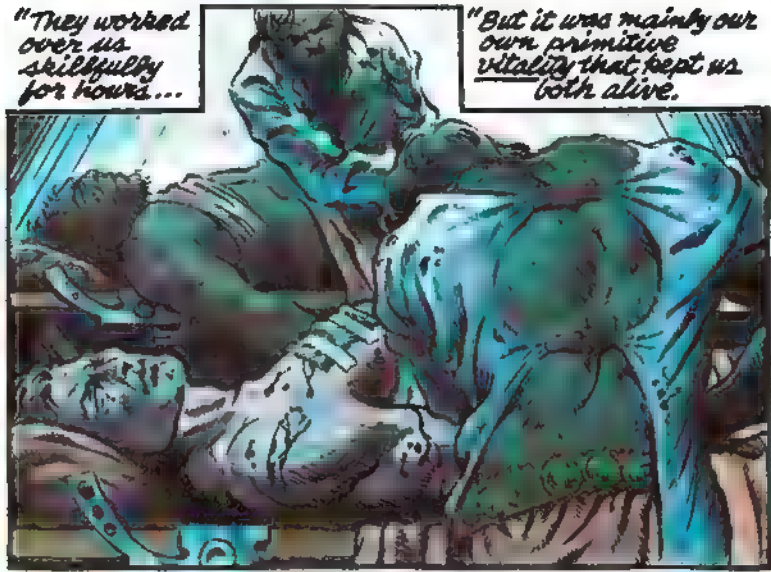
"...a rush of darkness blotted out both stars and flickering torches, and I fell unconscious across Ghor's unmoving form."





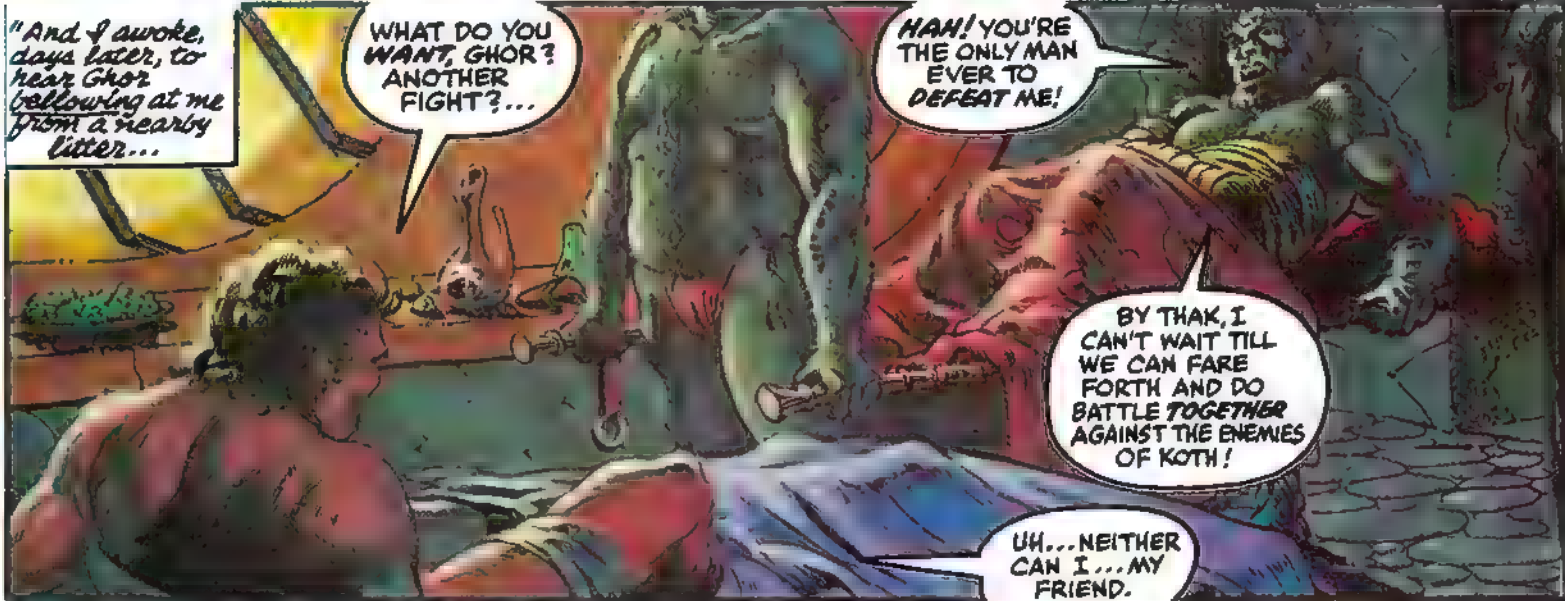
"Later, they told me they thought both of us must be dead..."

"...or at the very least would never walk again."



"They worked over us skillfully for hours..."

"But it was mainly our own primitive vitality that kept us both alive."



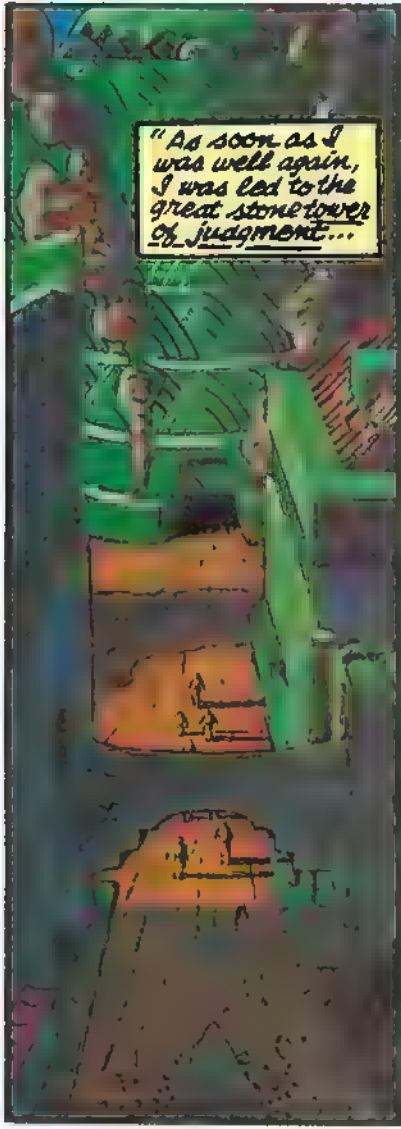
"And I awoke, days later, to hear Ghor bellowing at me from a nearby litter..."

WHAT DO YOU WANT, GHOR? ANOTHER FIGHT?...

HAN! YOU'RE THE ONLY MAN EVER TO DEFEAT ME!

BY THAK, I CAN'T WAIT TILL WE CAN FARE FORTH AND DO BATTLE TOGETHER AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF KOTH!

UH... NEITHER CAN I... MY FRIEND.



"As soon as I was well again, I was led to the great stone tower of judgment..."



"...to stand before the throne of Khosouth Skullsplitter, leader of the beast-men."

ESAU CAIRN, WE STILL CANNOT BELIEVE YOUR TALE THAT THERE IS LIFE ON DISTANT WORLDS.

STILL, YOU ARE A MIGHTY WARRIOR, NO MATTER WHERE YOU COME FROM...



FROM THIS DAY, YOU SHALL BE AS MUCH A MAN OF KOTH AS IF YOU HAD BEEN BORN INTO THE TRIBE.

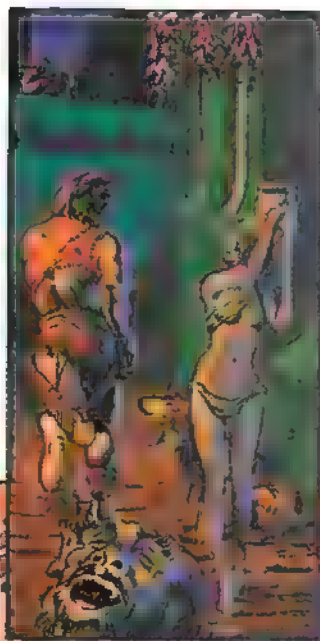
AND YOU SHALL BE NAMED-- IRON-HAND!

SAY IT, KOTHAN!

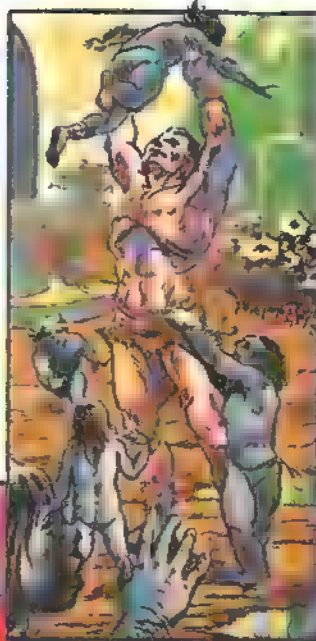


**IRON-
HAND!**

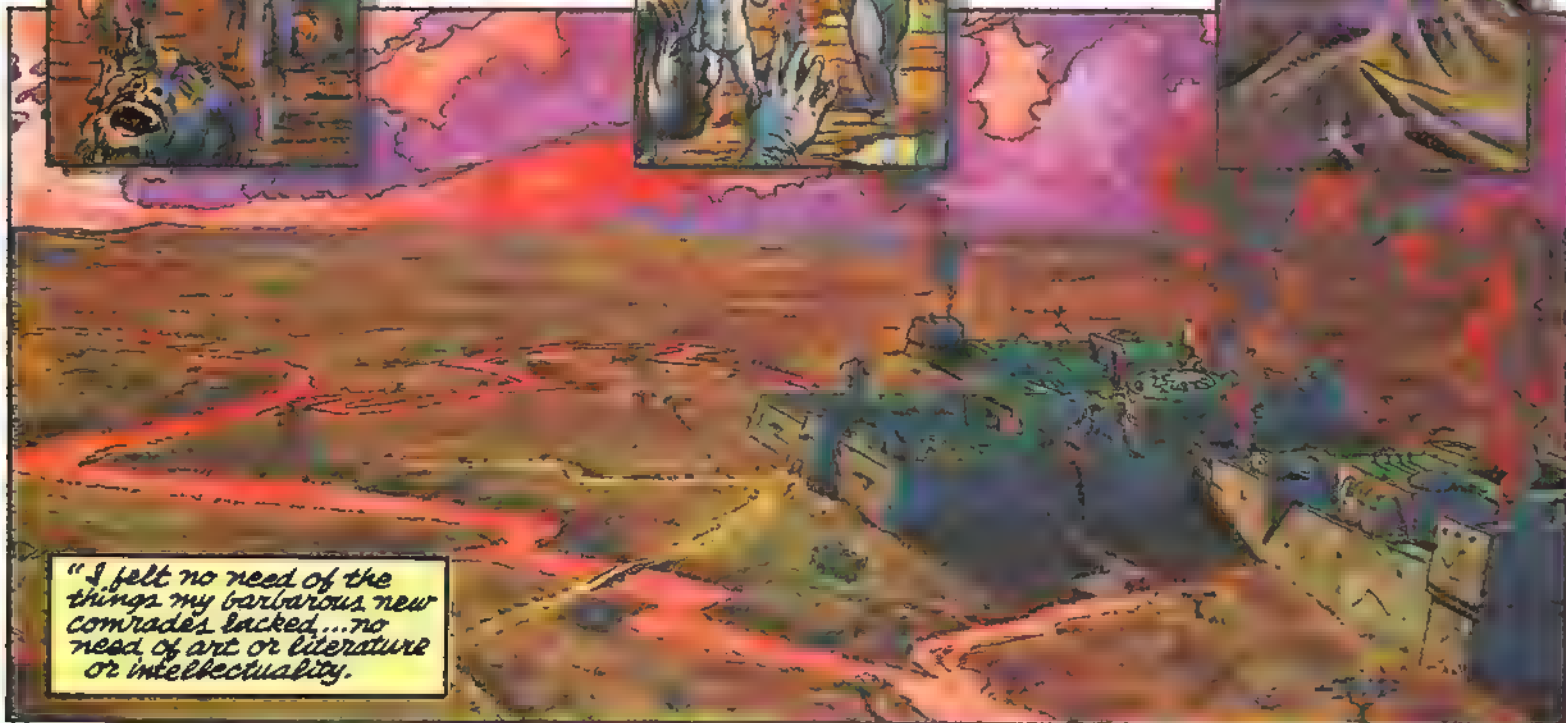
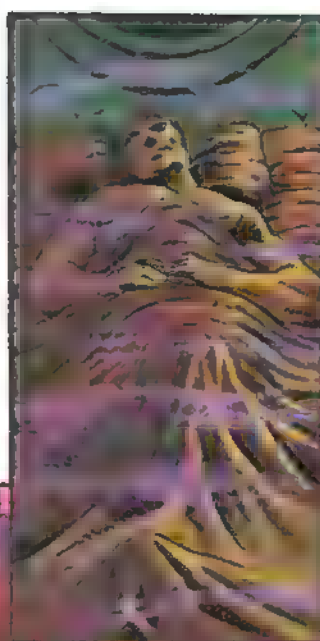
*"And the great
stone tower
shuddered with
the answering
echoes from
beastlike throats."*



"For months
I dwelt in
Koth, coming
to know its
people and
its life as if
I myself
had issued
forth from
the womb
of a woman
of Almuric..."



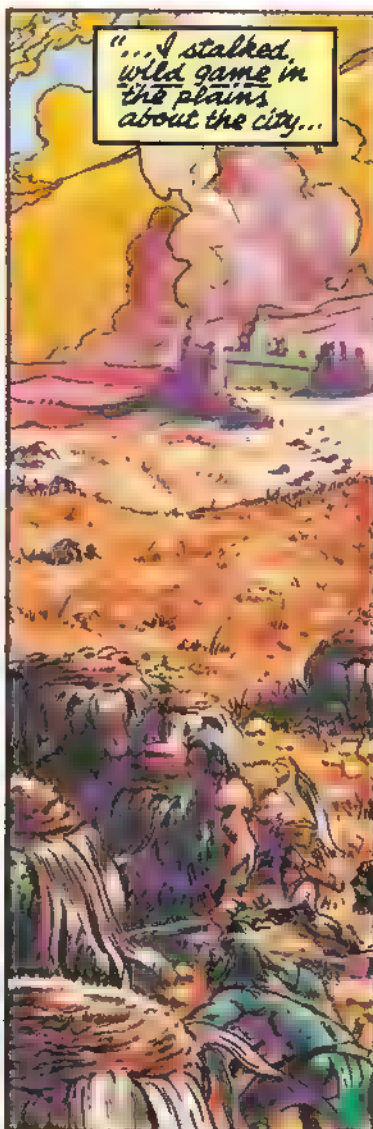
"And if,
when I
slept, I
dreamed
of Earth
and the
life I had
left... I
remember
it not."



"I felt no need of the
things my barbarous new
comrades lacked...no
need of art or literature
or intellectuality."



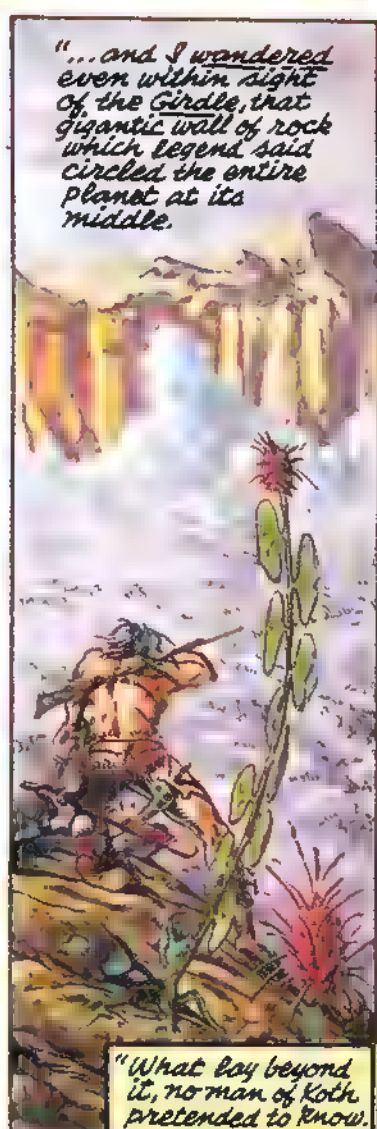
"No, rather,
I hunted..."



"...I stalked
wild game in
the plains
about the city..."



"...I fought..."



"...and I wandered
even within sight
of the Girdle, that
gigantic wall of rock
which legend said
circled the entire
planet at its
middle."

"What lay beyond
it, no man of Koth
pretended to know."



"The Guras, as the beast-men called their own kind, lived in their monolithic cities, behind high-impregnable walls.

"Yet a few of them, when drinking, did speak of things beyond..."



THE YAGAS, YOU SAY? WHAT ARE THEY?

AN EVIL RACE OF WINGED MEN!

THEY DWELL FAR TO THE SOUTH, ON THE ROCK YUTHLA.

I KNOW NO MORE.

"And in truth, I sought to learn no more.



"Instead, I passed my time in friendly bouts and drunken brawls.

"I revelled in my new existence... hunting, gorging, guzzling.



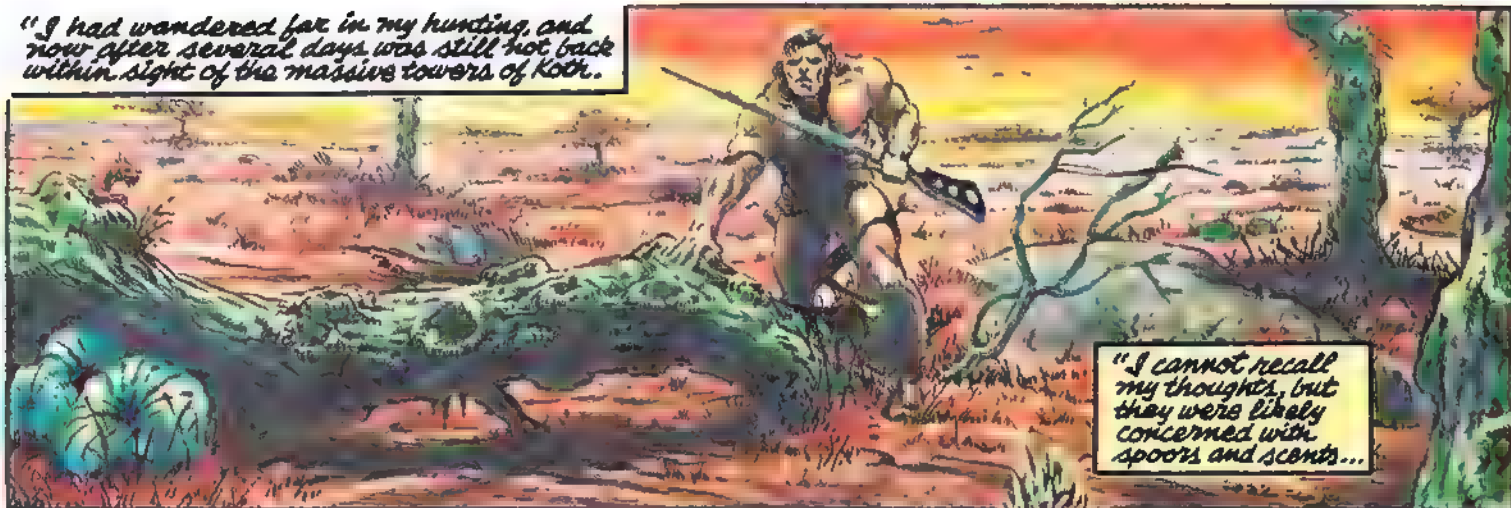
"I spread my massive arms and clutched at life like a glutton!

"And in my brawling and carousing, I all but forgot the slender figure which had watched so fearfully when I had done battle in the arena with Ghor the Bear.

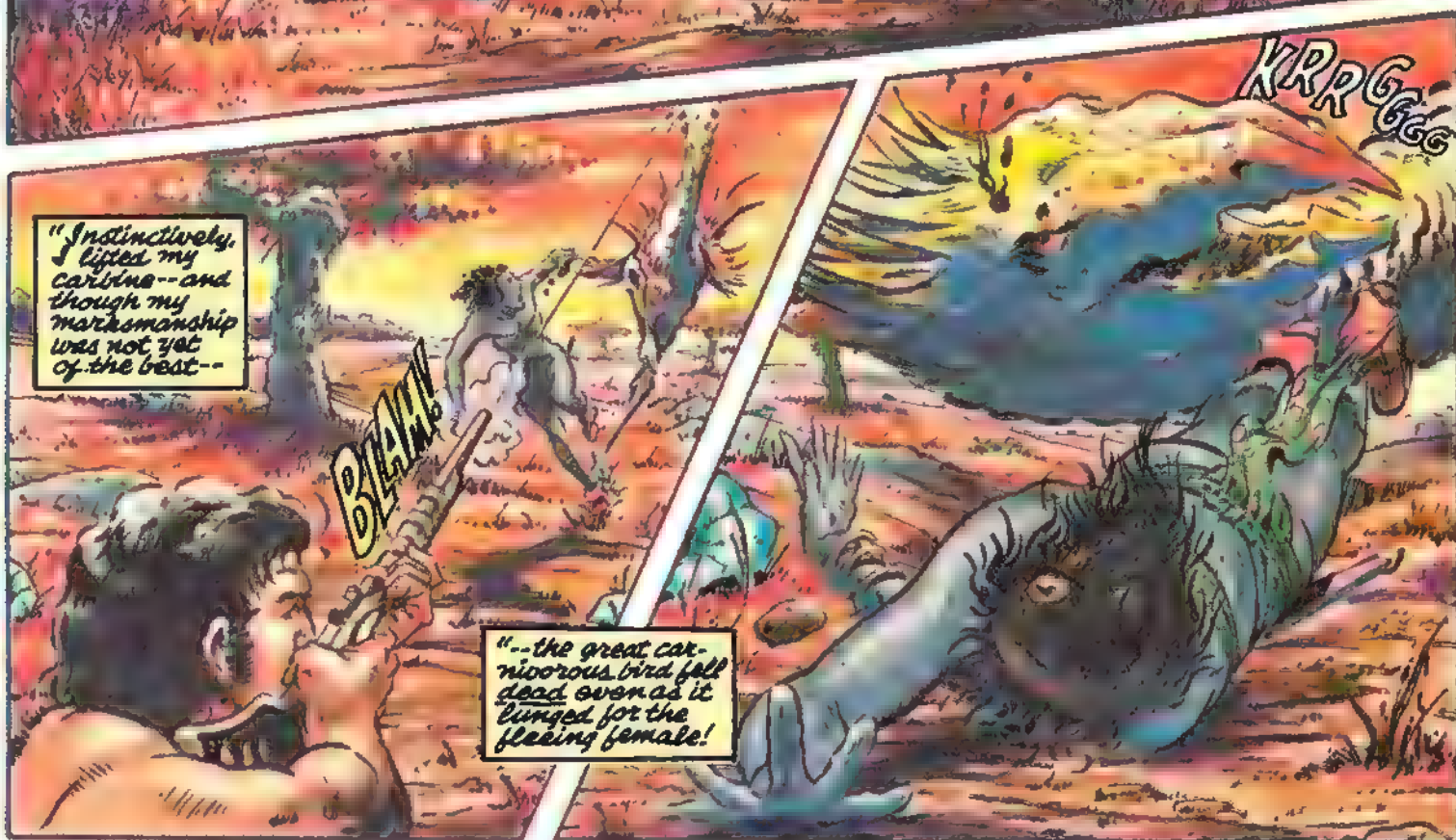
"I all but forgot... the girl called Altha.



"I had wandered far in my hunting, and now after several days was still not back within sight of the massive towers of Koor."



"I cannot recall my thoughts, but they were likely concerned with spoor and scents..."



"Instinctively, I lifted my carbine--and though my marksmanship was not yet of the best--"

"--the great carnivorous bird fell dead even as it lunged for the fleeing female!"

ARE YOU ALL
RI--ALTHA!?

WHAT ARE
YOU DOING
OUTSIDE
THE CITY?
HAVE YOU
GONE MAD?



NOW WHAT DID I DO--EXCEPT
SAVE YOUR LIFE?

I DO NOT
FIT HERE...
SO I WOULD
BE BETTER
OFF DEAD.

YOU'RE A **STRANGE**
GIRL, ALTHA... NOT LIKE THE
OTHER WOMEN OF KOTH.

NOW,
COME, I'LL
TAKE YOU
BACK...

AND MY FATHER
ZAL WILL WHIP
ME-- BUT I
WILL RUN AWAY
AGAIN, AND
AGAIN, AND
AGAIN!

RUN
AWAY?

BUT **WHY?** AND-- WHERE TO?

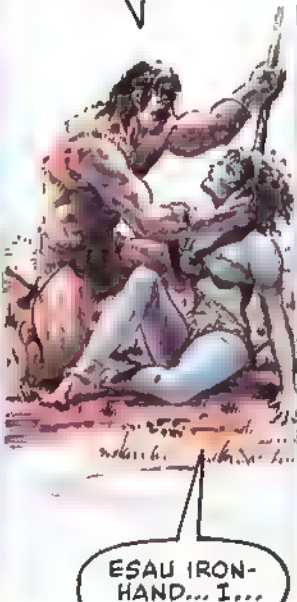
IT DOESN'T
MATTER. I LOOK
FOR SOMETHING
THAT IS NOT, AND
NEVER WAS...

...AND I
BRUISE MY-
SELF ON LIFE'S
ROUGH EDGES.



I'VE HEARD
MEN ON MY
OWN WORLD
VOICE SUCH
FEELINGS...
BUT I'VE NEVER
HEARD THEM
ON **ALMURIC**
BEFORE.

COME! I'LL SEE TO IT
THAT ZAL THE THROWER
DOESN'T LAY A FINGER
ON YOU.



ESAU IRON-
HAND... I...



**LOOK
OUT!**



"Strange that, even mesmerized as I was by Atha's words, I had not heard before the thrash of wings."

"Yet now as I wheeled about, I saw the air above me thronged with dark and fearsome shapes..."

YAGAS!

"I had heard of these terrible winged men, more demonic than human - and of how they dwelt in the grim city of Yagaz, on the rock within the river Yagaz, in the land of Yag - and I had half-believed them a myth, a legend."

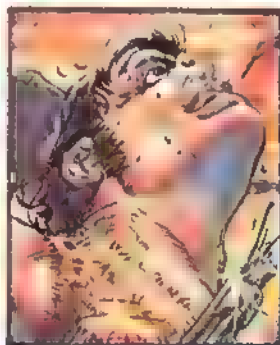
"How wrong I had been I knew now, in a single horrifying moment!"

"Would to God that I had thought to re-load my single-shot rifle as soon as the storm-bird had fallen..."

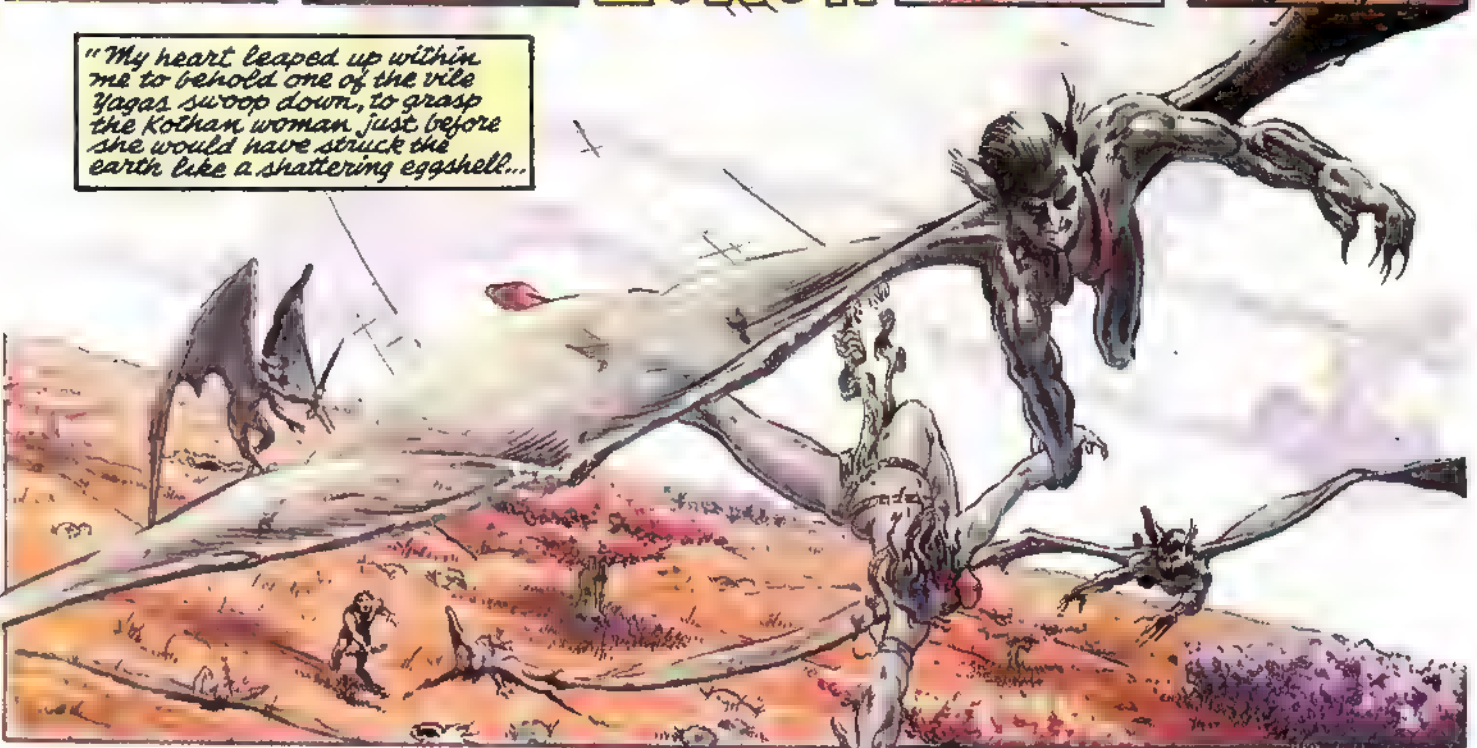
"But now, I struck both with sword..."

"...and with carbine."

"Nor did the beautiful Alpha fail to do battle on her own behalf... but she had struck a few seconds too late..."



"My heart leaped up within me to behold one of the vile Yagas swoop down, to grasp the Kothan woman just before she would have struck the earth like a shattering eggshell..."





"But I knew anguish for the first time in months, as they bore her away toward their citadel of mystery far to the south."



"They were already nearly gone from my straining sight, when--"



YUNNGGH--!

SO, MY CARBINE DIDN'T QUITE CRACK YOUR SKULL, DID IT? I SHOULD-- NO!

THE KOTHANS TELL ME YOU YAGS SPEAK THEIR TONGUE...



SO HEAR ME: YOU'RE GOING TO CARRY ME THROUGH THE AIR IN PURSUIT OF YOUR COMPANIONS, OR--

I CANNOT CARRY YOUR WEIGHT, HAIRLESS ONE.

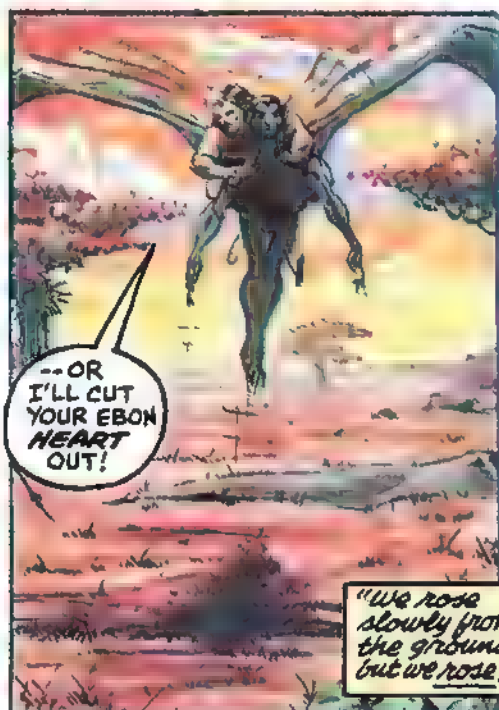


THEN THAT'S TOO BAD FOR YOU!

TAKE THE AIR! FLY, DAMN YOU--



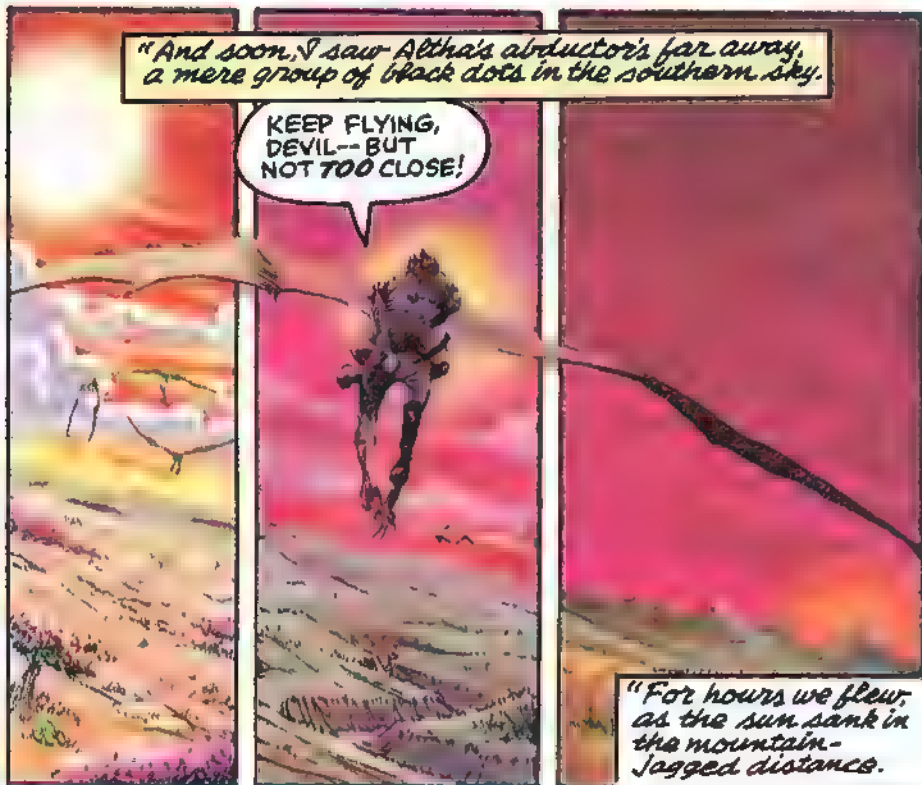
--OR I'LL CUT YOUR EBON HEART OUT!



"We rose slowly from the ground... but we rose!"

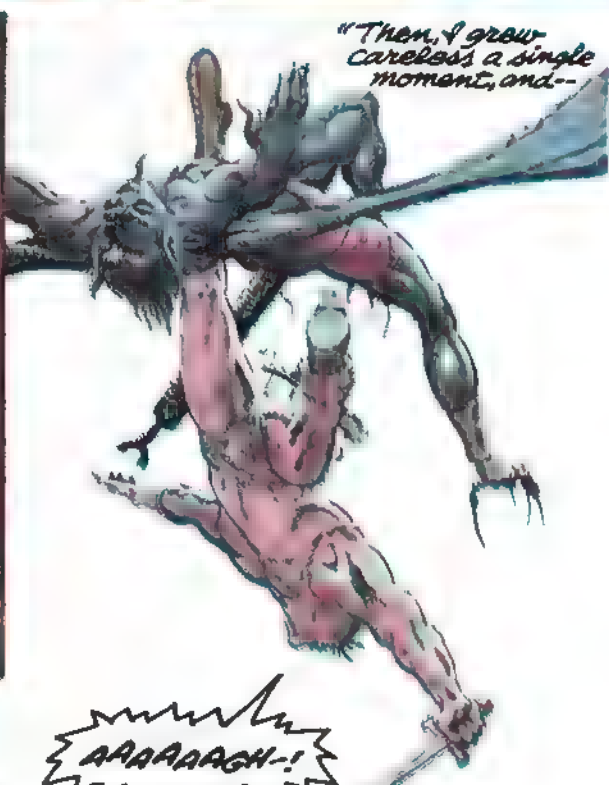
"And soon, I saw Altha's abductor's far away, a mere group of black dots in the southern sky."

KEEP FLYING, DEVIL-- BUT NOT TOO CLOSE!



"For hours we flew, as the sun sank in the mountain-jagged distance."

"Then, I grew careless a single moment, and--"



AAAAAGH--!

"I fell--

"--though
luckily, not
far.

"...to see my
former captive
dropping
slowly toward
some distant
ruins.

"I cursed inwardly, for I was
myself in need of shelter...

"yet, next
instant,
the Yaga
reappeared--

"From
hiding,
I looked
aloft...

"And besides,
I suspected his
fellow Yagas
might be rest-
ing there, as
well.

"If they
came looking
for me--!

"--shooting
up out of the
ruins like
a rocket!

"As he swept off
southward, as if
panic-stricken, I
set out for the
broken pillars...
and reached them
soon after nightfall.

"A brooding silence
lay over the ruined
marble city as I
entered--

"--and I
soon saw
why.

"The Yagas who had kidnapped Alpha lay strewn about the plaza in a way to appall the hardest..."

"...but there was no sign of the girl herself, either alive or dead."

"Only a trail of blood..."

"...which I followed grimly."

"Yet all the while, I felt the glare of hidden eyes upon me..."

ESAU CAIRN--!

ALPHA!

"--till, as thunder clapped in the distance, I suddenly saw--"

ALPHA!

ESAU!
OH,
ESAU--!

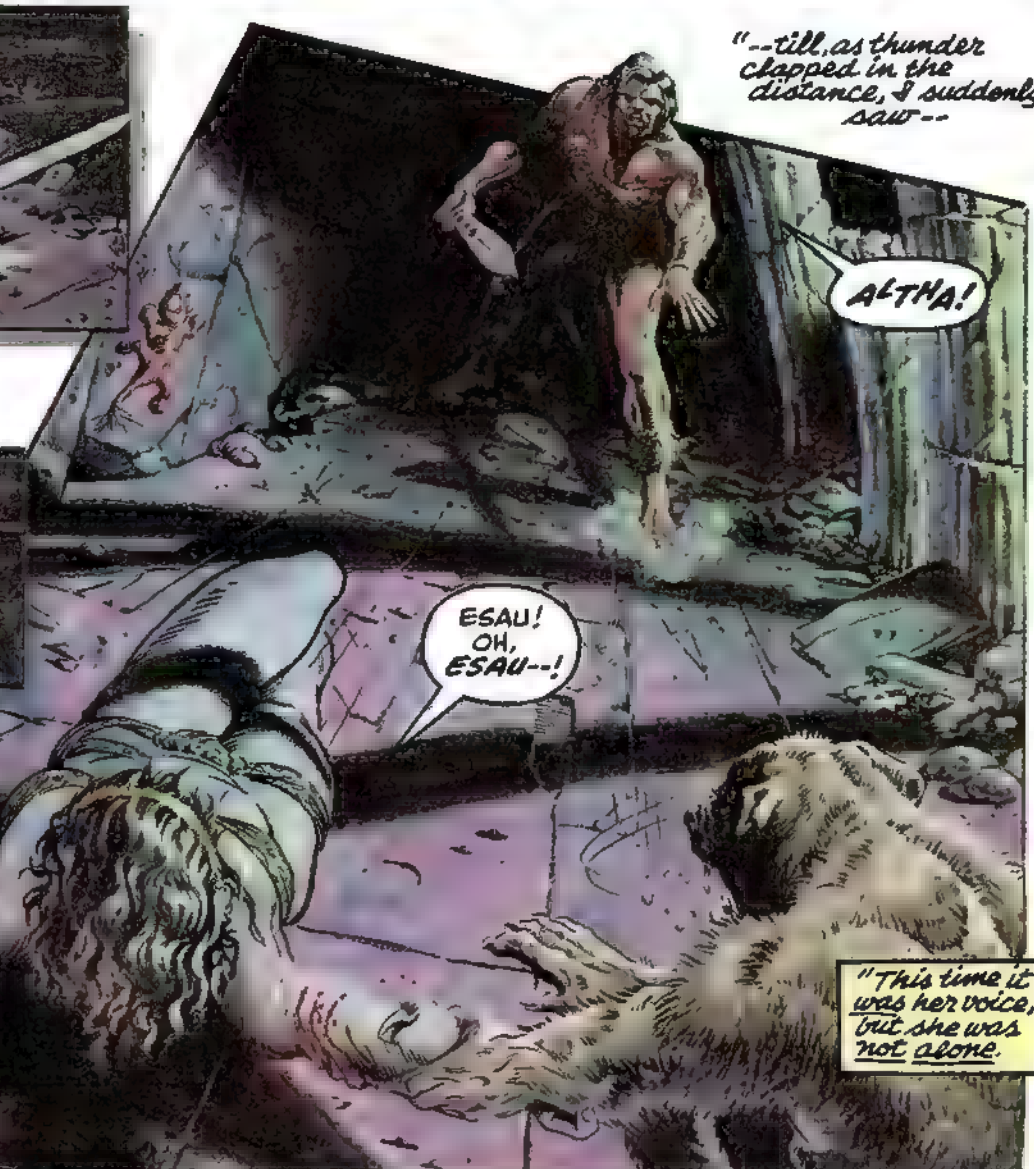
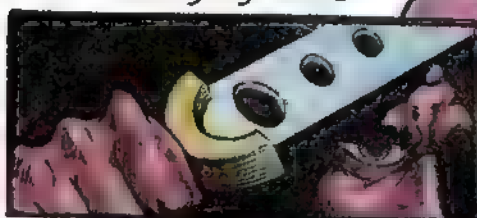
"This time it was her voice, but she was not alone."

"On every side rose a medley of shrill, demoniac voices, all shrieking my name--"

"But I raced on, sword in hand--"



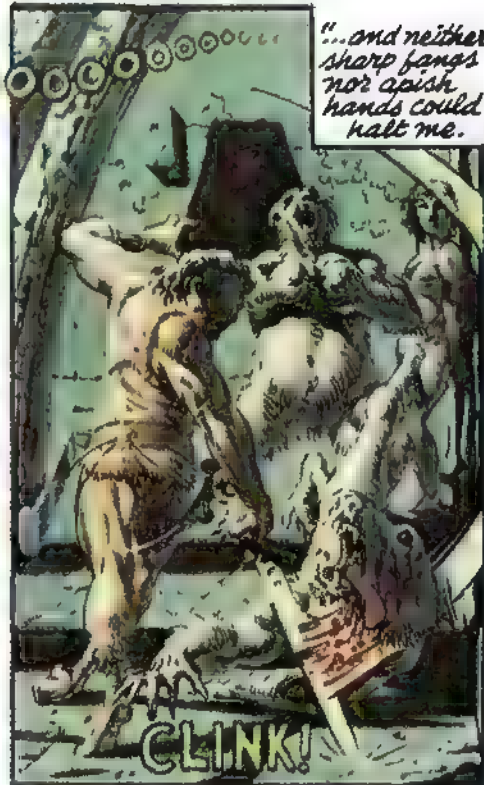
"It was not Alpha's voice, I knew as I ran toward the sound-- but then who?"



"With a bloodthirsty yell I charged the dog-heads--"



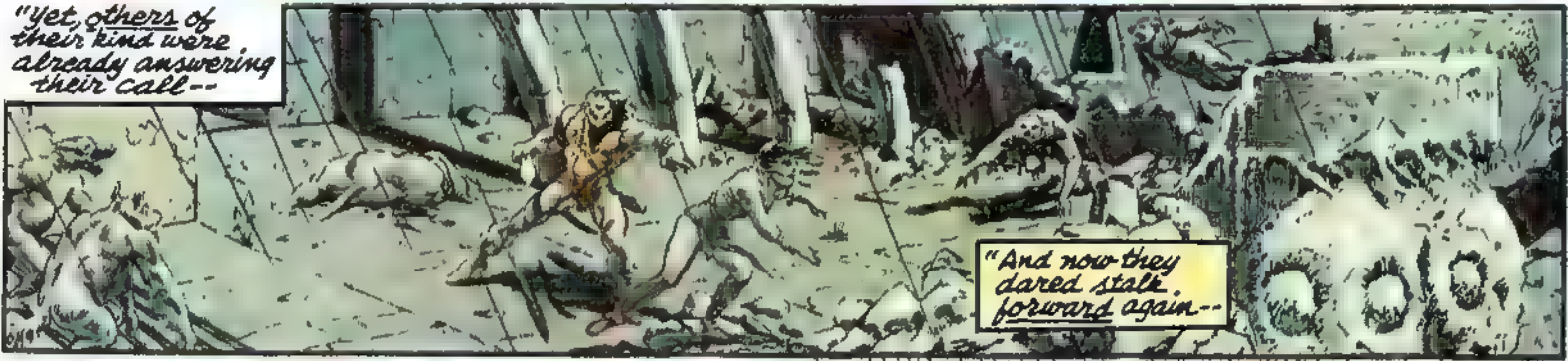
"...and neither sharp fangs nor apish hands could halt me."



"I reached Altha, as the creatures gave back before my whistling sword--"

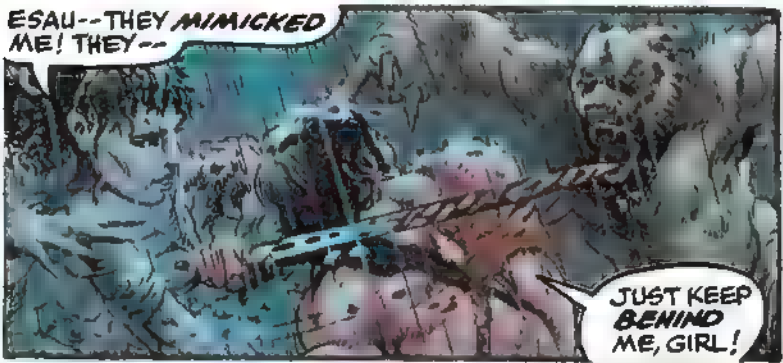


"yet, others of their kind were already answering their call--"



"And now they dared stalk forward again--"

ESAU--THEY MIMICKED ME! THEY--



JUST KEEP BEHIND ME, GIRL!



"--as I backed up the ruined stair, battling every inch of the way."



ESAU--HURRY--



ESAU--!

"The dog-heads fled, howling as the spider-like thing raged among them with maddening quickness and ferocity..."

IT'S COMING-- FOR US!

"...but I was the one it had followed here."

"And where the fangs and claws of a thousand dog-heads would have been futile--"

"--the brain and throat of a single man prevailed!"

WHY DO THEY CALL YOU... IRON-HAND?

EH?

YOU ARE STRONG... BUT YOUR TOUCH IS SO GENTLE...

YOU WOULD NOT HURT ME?

WHY?

"The absurdity of the question left me speechless..."

IT IS MY ENEMIES I WISH TO HURT, ALTHA... NOT YOU.

"...so I left it unanswered as we raced head-long into the rain-drenched distance..."

ALMURIC

EPISODE THREE

ESAU CAIRN'S NARRATIVE

(AS TRANSCRIBED FROM THE DICTAPHONE
JOURNAL OF PROF. AVERY HILDEBRAND)

*"Until the storm came, I had
never guessed how impenetrable
darkness can be."*

COURAGE,
GIRL! IT WILL
END SOON--

--I
HOPE!

*"And amid it all, as terrified
grazers bounded past us,
I stood with my back against
a sizable rock, sheltering
my beloved Altha with my
body as best I could."*

ROY THOMAS - SCRIPT

TIM CONRAD - ART

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY
ROBERT E. HOWARD

WAIT!
WHAT SOUND
WAS THAT?

THE
WIND,
ONLY, MY
LOVE.

ELECT

FROM PROF. HILDE-
BRAND'S FOOTNOTES
TO THE NARRATIVE
OF ESAU CAIRN:

For reasons unknown
to me, the cloudless
storms of Almuric
always cause a tempo-
rary INTERRUPTION in
my contact with the
valiant man I sent by
secret means to a
far-distant star-world.

NO, NOT THAT--
SOMETHING *ELSE!*
SOMETHING THAT--

Consider the IRONY
OF Fleeing count-
less light years,
after killing an
evil politician--

--only to become
the mightiest
man-slayer on
ALMURIC, as
well!

OH,
CHRIST--!

It was not the hairy male
KOTHANS or their ilk, how-
ever, who were his natural
Foes there...

...but the dread,
ebony-winged
YAGAS, From whom
he sought to
rescue the lovely
Kothian named
ALTHA.

WAAAA!

A THUGRAN, ESAU! BEWARE!

HOLD, FRIEND! I'VE NO QUARREL WITH YOU.

ALL WHO ARE NOT THUGRANS ARE OUR ENEMIES!

YET, IF YOU WILL LEAVE ME YOUR WOMAN, PERHAPS I'LL LET YOU--

GO TO HELL YOU HAIRY DEVIL!

"I've only a brief, chaotic memory of the next few seconds..."

ESAU IRON-HAND! MORE OF THEM!

"...a whirl of strokes and parries... a brief clanging of steel..."

"...the vision of Altha, fighting as only the women of Almuric can fight..."

"...then, the thunder of a blow from behind

UNGH!

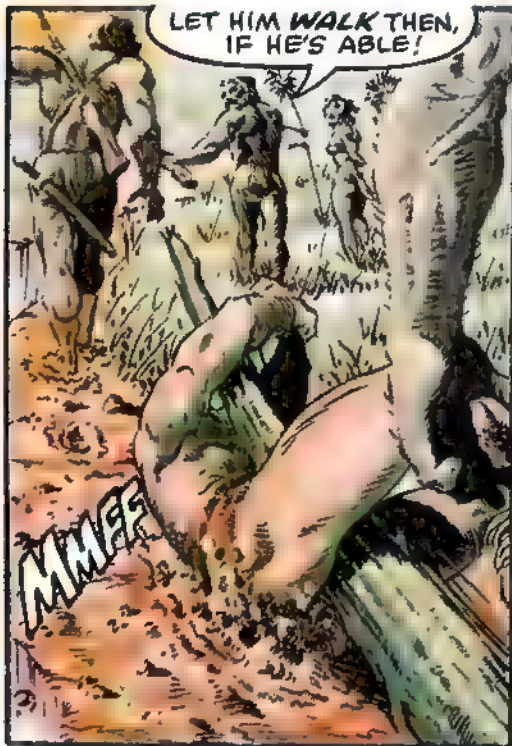
"...and the lights went out."

"I came to with the impression that I was lying in a small boat which was rocking and tossing in a storm... though in fact, the sky was clear and bright..."

LOGAR! THE DOG IS CONSCIOUS, AT LAST!



LET HIM WALK THEN, IF HE'S ABLE!

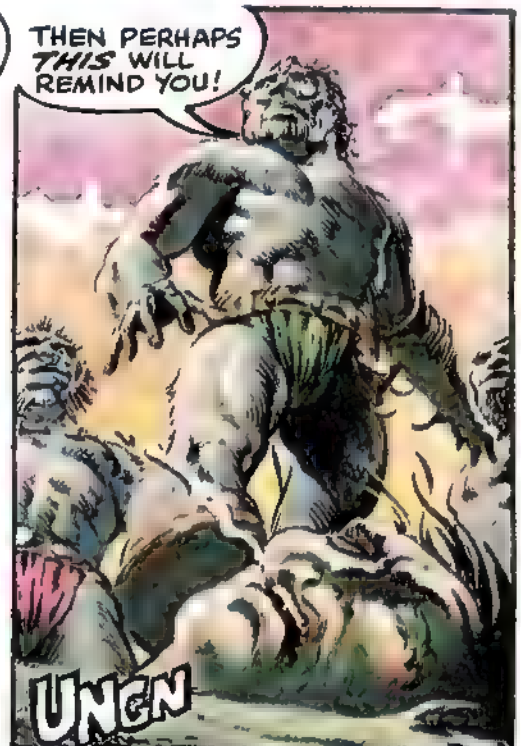


WELL, YOU HAIRLESS APE? DO YOU REMEMBER LOGAR THE BONE-CRUSHER, WHOSE JAW YOU ONCE UNFAIRLY BROKE?



NO?

THEN PERHAPS THIS WILL REMIND YOU!



BEAST! COWARD!



YOU'D NOT DARE FACE HIM IN FAIR BATTLE!

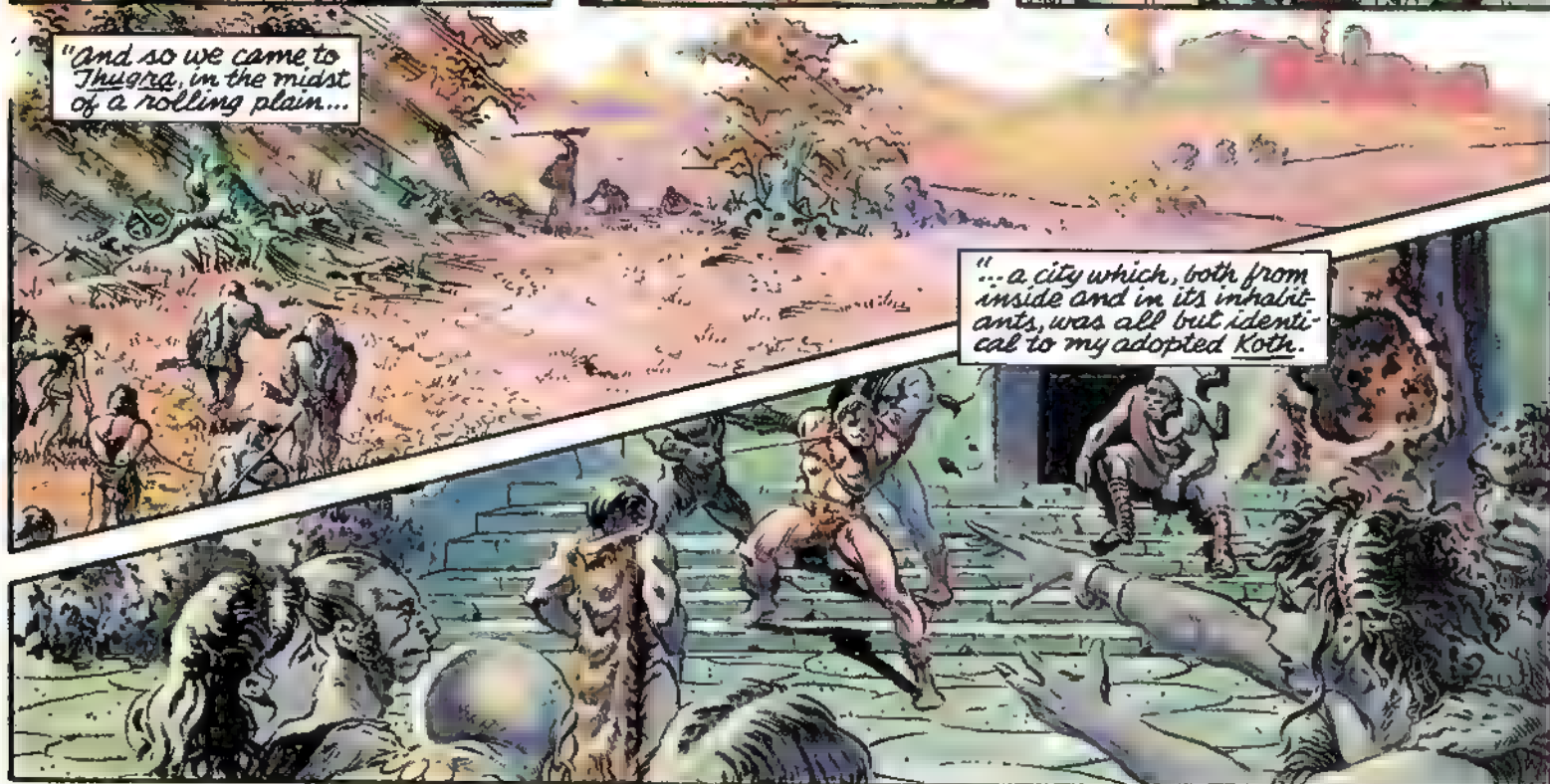
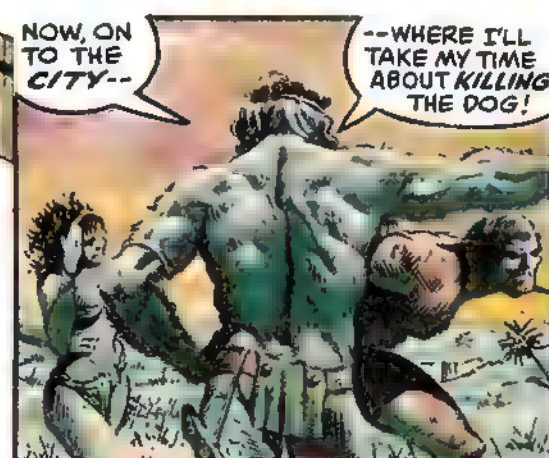
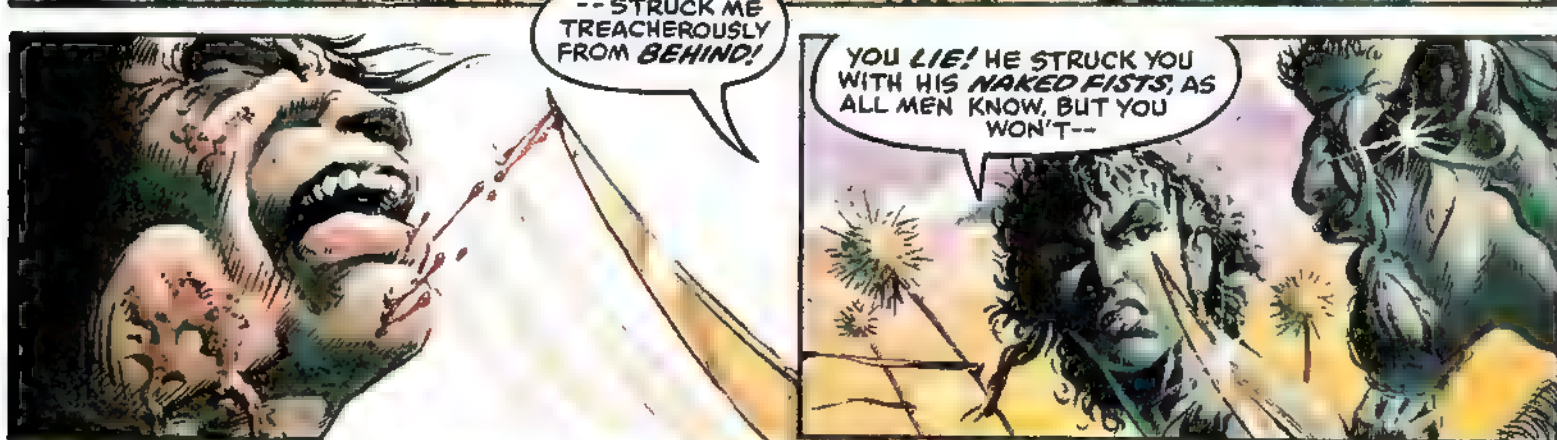
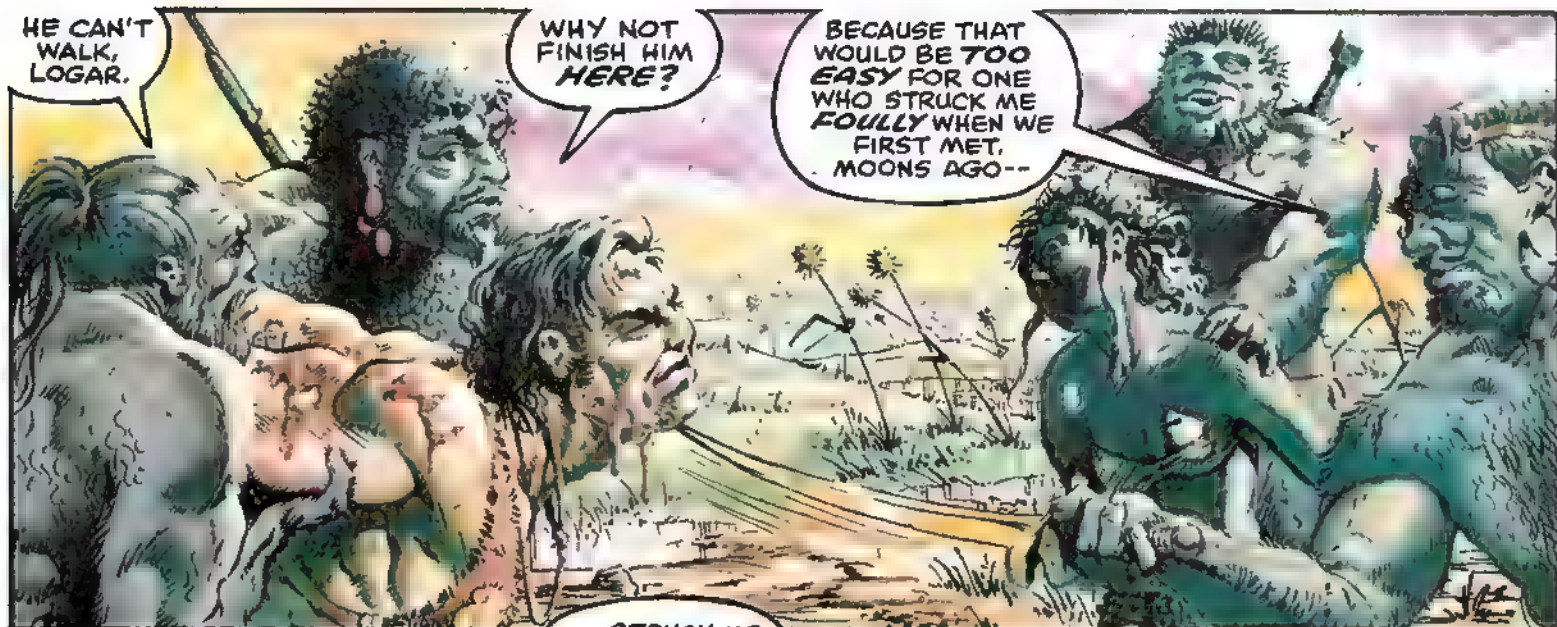


GET HER AWAY--



--AND STAND THE DOG UP!





"Slow days crawled by, each an exquisite torture to me..."

"For, Logar came each day to torment me with obscene tales of his treatment of Altha."

"I knew not whether he lied."

"Then, one midnight, I awoke to the clash of steel, the screaming of women from without."

"There was fighting in the city beyond a doubt--yet who--?"

"Then--"

ESAU
IRON-HAND!

HERE,
ALTHA!
BUT
HOW--?

DOOM, ESAU!
DOOM FROM
THE SKIES!

THE YAGAS HAVE
DESCENDED UPON
THUGRA, BY THE
THOUSANDS!

THE CITY
BURNS EVEN
NOW, AND--
OHH!

LOGAR!

IT'S TRUE,
DOG--

--THUGRA
FALLS!

BUT
I'LL REST
EASIER IN
HELL THIS
NIGHT--

--KNOWING
YOU PRECEDED
ME IN DEATH!

NO!
KEEP AWAY
FROM HIM!

"yet, it was I myself who kept Logar away, with the full force of my knee against his chin--"



"--and the impact must have broken his bull-neck like a rotted twig!"



NOW, ALTHA, HURRY AND--



TAKE THEM!--

TAKE THEM BOTH!

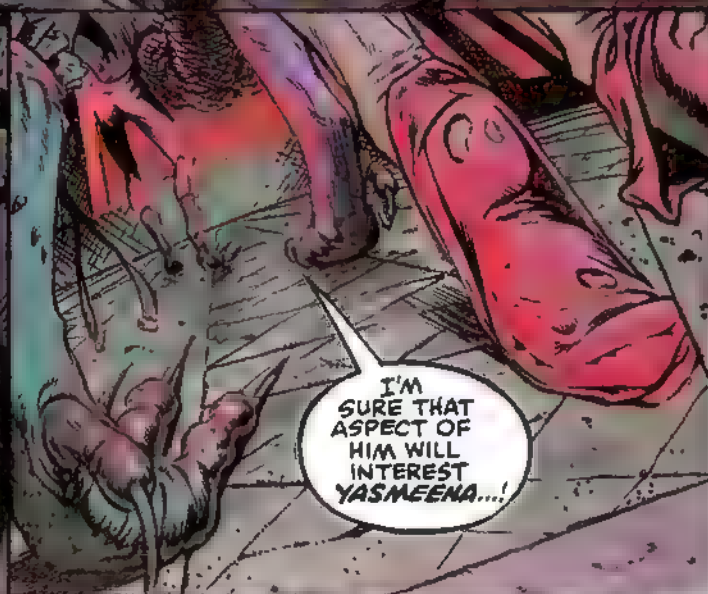
WHY THE MAN?



WHO EVER SAW A WHITE-SKINNED MAN, WITH BLUE EYES, BEFORE?



TAKE CARE, THOUGH! HE HAS THE THEWS OF A LION!



I'M SURE THAT ASPECT OF HIM WILL INTEREST YASMEENA....!

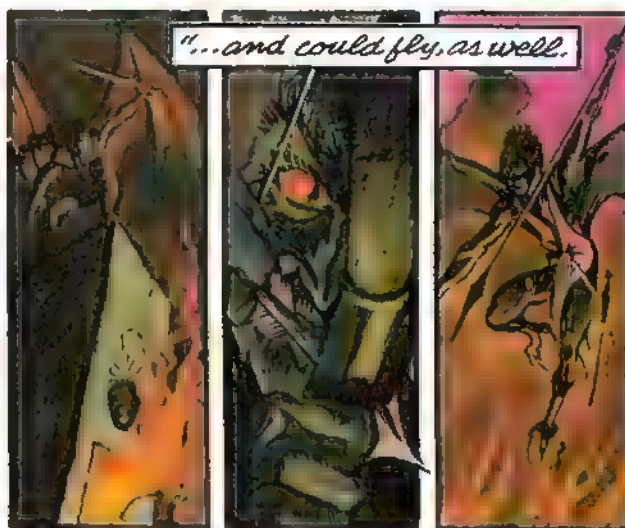


"In a silken net they bore me out into the frenzy of the streets..."

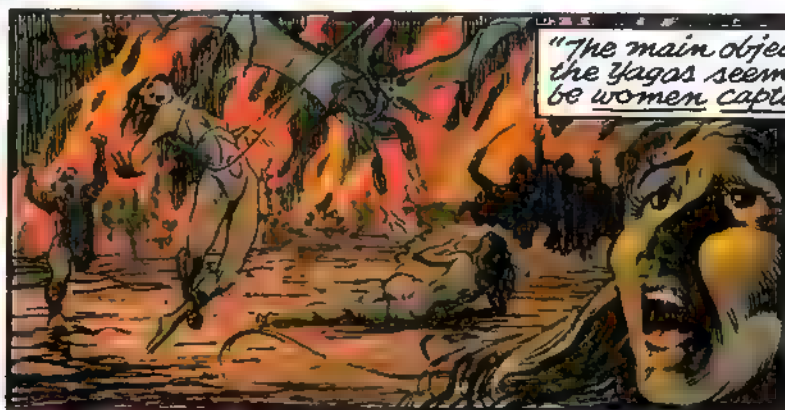
"...where, among burning buildings and crashing walls, the men of Thugra were fighting with the fury of dying panthers."



"Not all the killing was on one side, for any Thugra was more than a match for a single Yaga... but the winged devils far outnumbered them..."



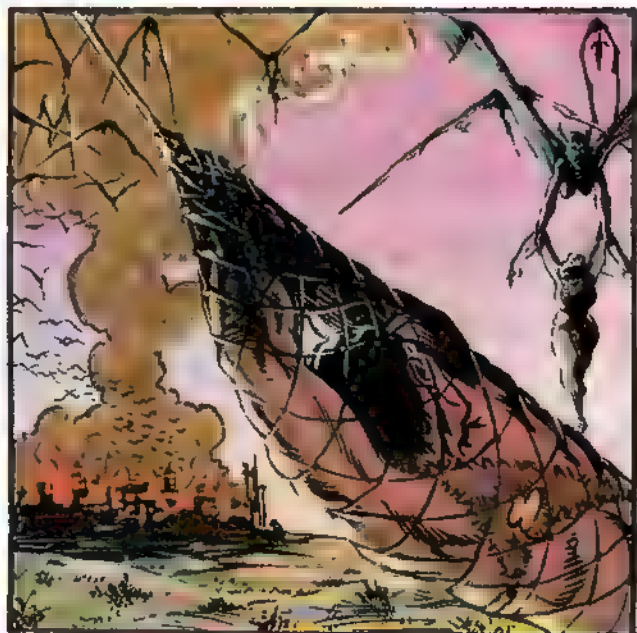
"...and could fly, as well."



"The main object of the Yagas seemed to be women captives..."

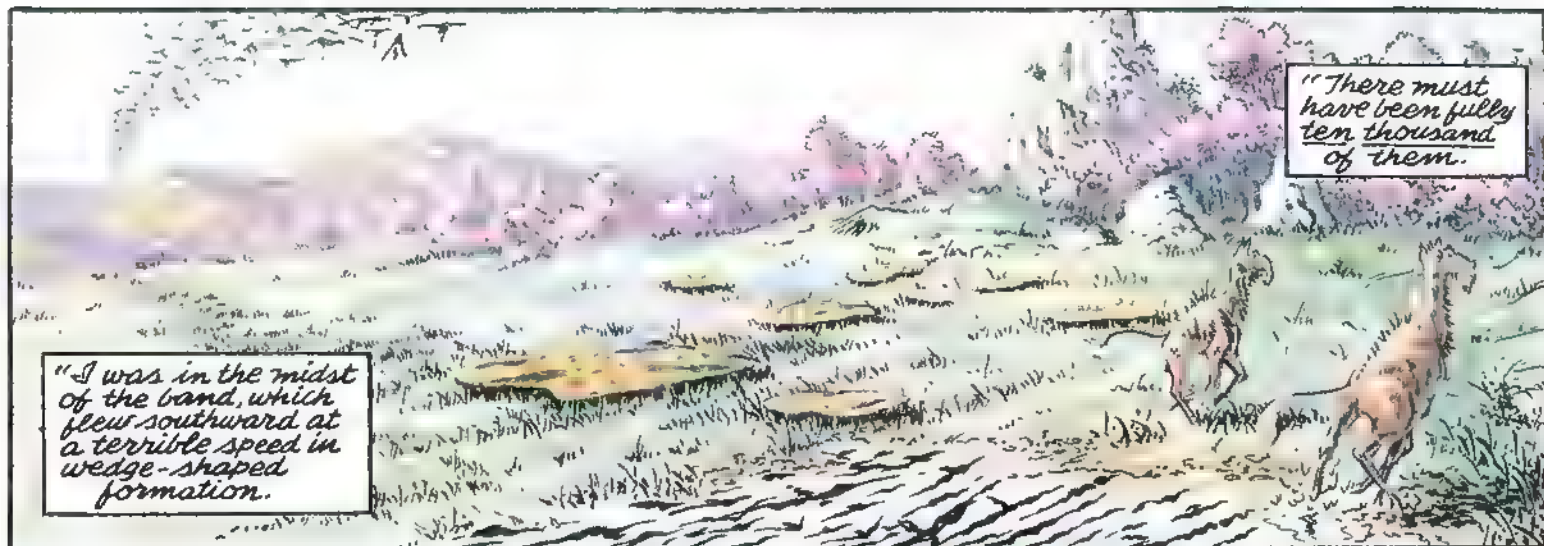


"At last, the deafening thunder of the devouring flames still in my ears, my captors whirled me away as well from the reeking city."



"...and the few Thugra survivors fired their carbines as the females were borne off..."

"...preferring to risk killing the women, rather than let them be carried off to an unknown fate."



"There must have been fully ten thousand of them."

"I was in the midst of the band, which flew southward at a terrible speed in wedge-shaped formation."



"Many of the Yagas bore women, with an ease that spoke of incredible wing-power, until the sun left the sky."



"Then, they paused for the night, and ate..."



"...and their food was some of their miserable captives!"



"Afterward, the gorged demons lay about their fires in slumber."

"Had Alpha perished this night, I wondered?"



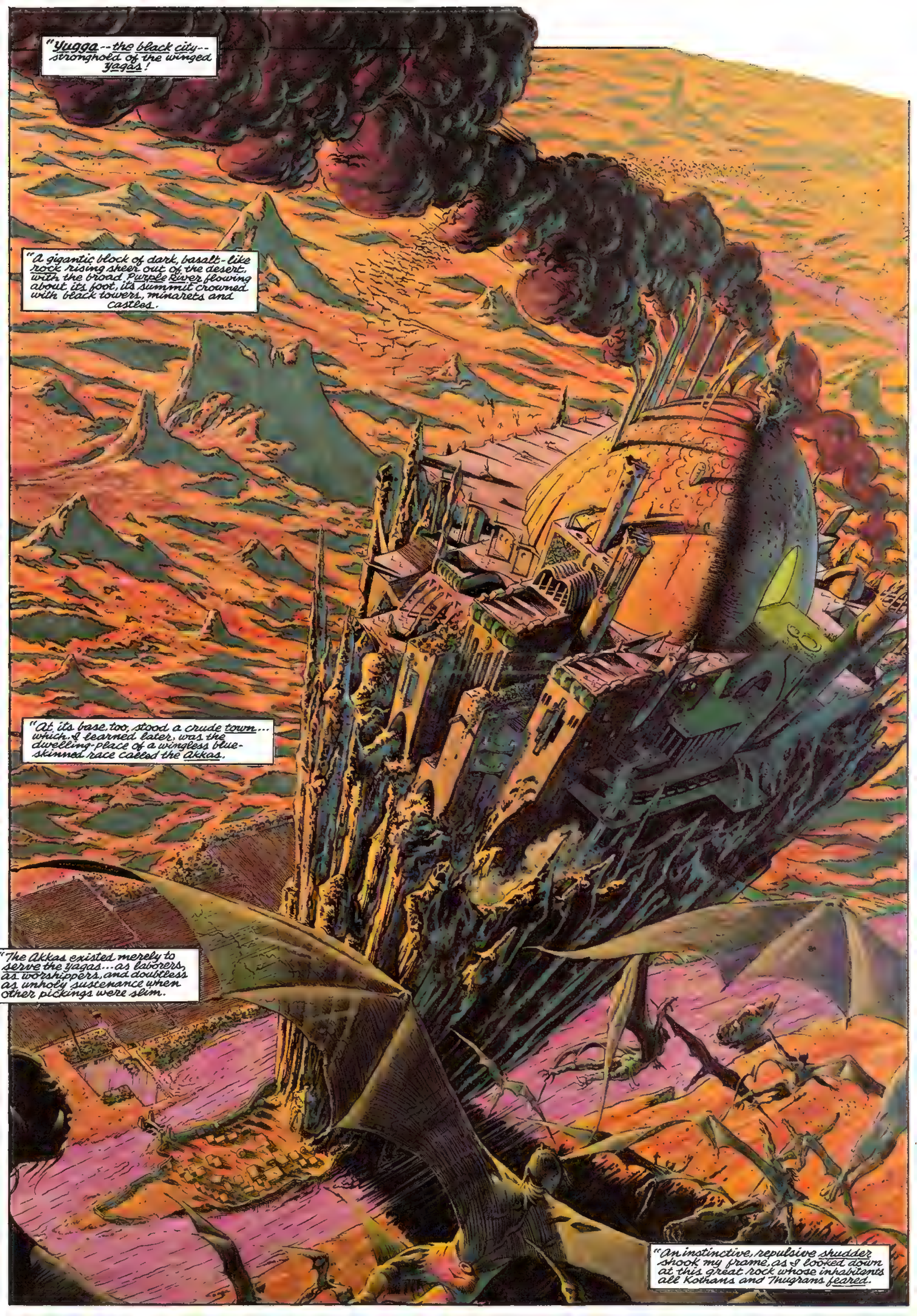
"At dawn, we took to the air again..."



"...flying without stop until we saw..."



"...Yugga!"



*"Yugga--the black city--
stronghold of the winged
yagas!"*

*"A gigantic block of dark, basalt-like
rock rising sheer out of the desert,
with the broad Purple River flowing
about its foot, its summit crowned
with black towers, minarets and
castles."*

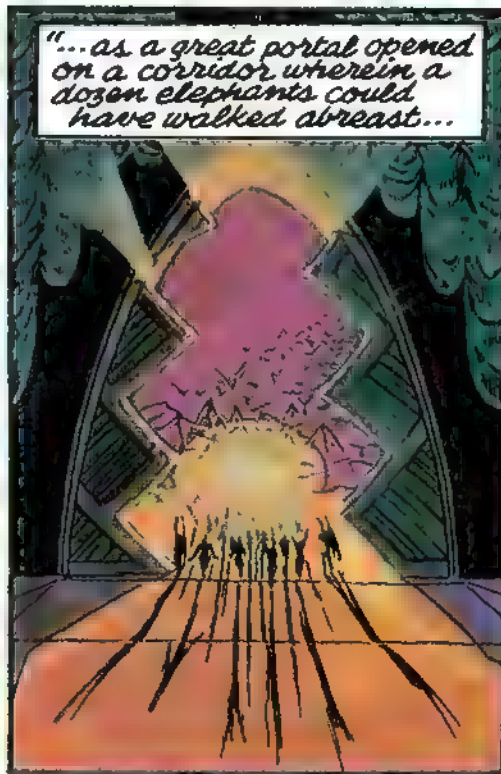
*"At its base, too, stood a crude town...
which, I learned later, was the
dwelling-place of a wingless blue-
skinned race called the Akkas."*

*"The Akkas existed, merely to
serve the yagas...as laborers,
as worshippers, and doubtless
as unwholy sustenance when
other pickings were slim."*

*"An instinctive, repulsive shudder
shook my frame, as I looked down
at this great rock whose inhabitants
all Kothans and Thugrans feared."*



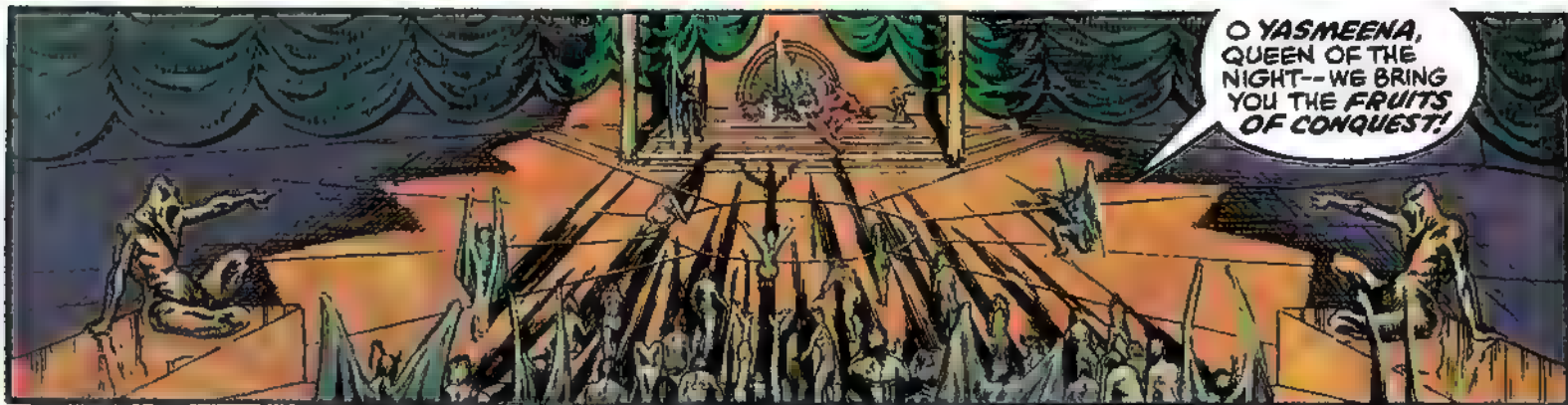
"I had little opportunity to observe, however..."



"...as a great portal opened on a corridor wherein a dozen elephants could have walked abreast..."



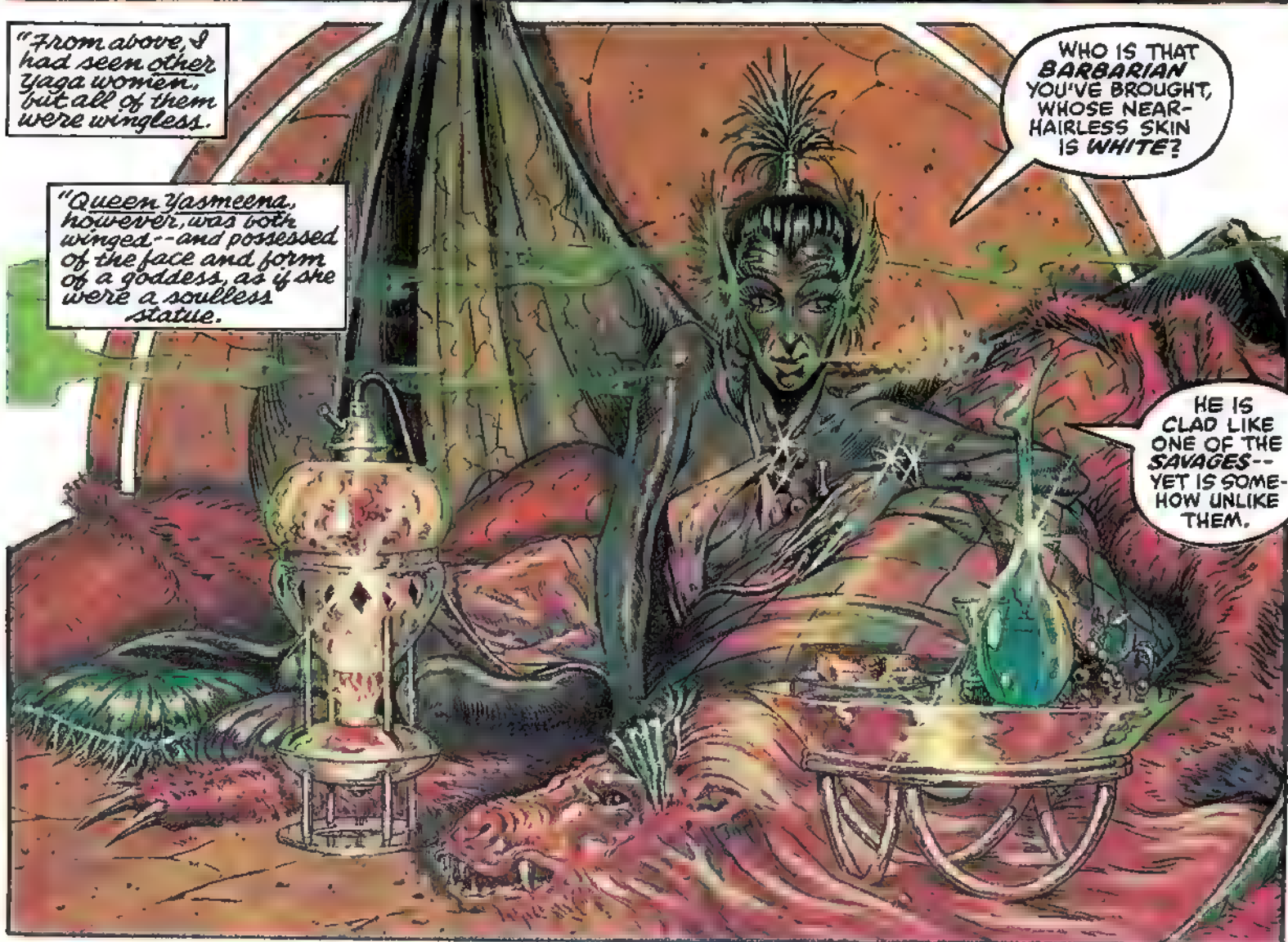
"...and the women and I were herded rudely inside."



O YASMEENA, QUEEN OF THE NIGHT-- WE BRING YOU THE FRUITS OF CONQUEST!

"From above, I had seen other Yaga women, but all of them were wingless."

"Queen Yasmeena, however, was both winged-- and possessed of the face and form of a goddess, as if she were a soulless statue."



WHO IS THAT BARBARIAN YOU'VE BROUGHT, WHOSE NEAR-HAIRLESS SKIN IS WHITE?

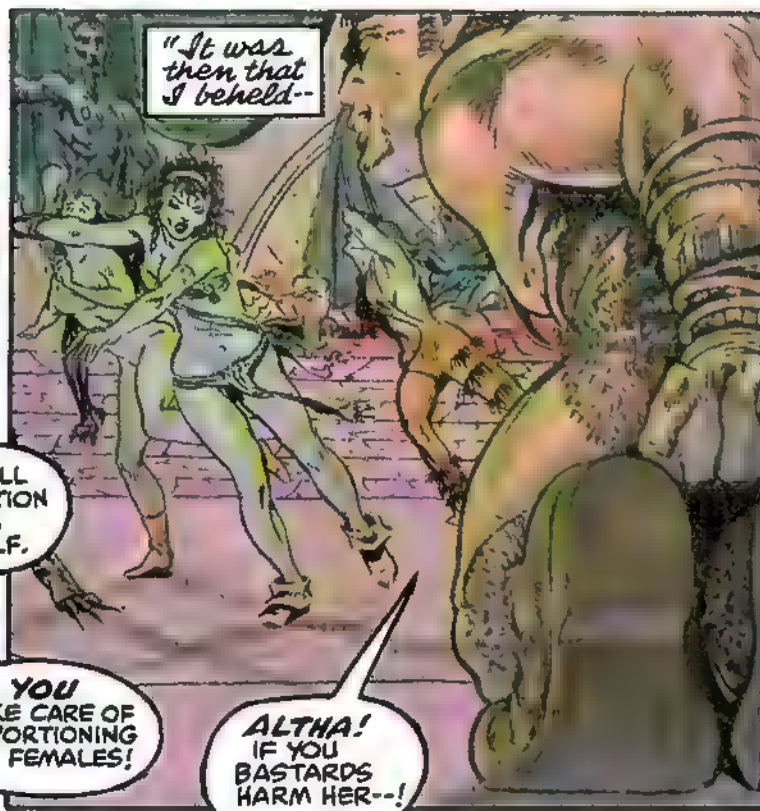
HE IS CLAD LIKE ONE OF THE SAVAGES-- YET IS SOMEHOW UNLIKE THEM.



WE FOUND HIM A CAPTIVE AMONG THE THUGRANS, O MISTRESS OF DARKNESS.

I SHALL QUESTION HIM MYSELF.

YOU TAKE CARE OF APPORTIONING THE FEMALES!



"It was then that I beheld--

ALTHA! IF YOU BASTARDS HARM HER--!



FORGET THE GIRL. WHO ARE YOU--

--WITH EYES THAT BLAZE LIKE BLUE FIRE?



I'LL SPEAK-- BUT YOU'LL THINK I LIE.

I'M ESAU CAIRN, WHOM THE KOTHANS CALL IRON-HAND.

AND I COME FROM ANOTHER WORLD, OF ANOTHER SOLAR SYSTEM!



I BELIEVE YOU...FOR, OF OLD, MEN PASSED FROM STAR TO STAR.

I THINK YOU SHALL LIVE... FOR A WHILE.

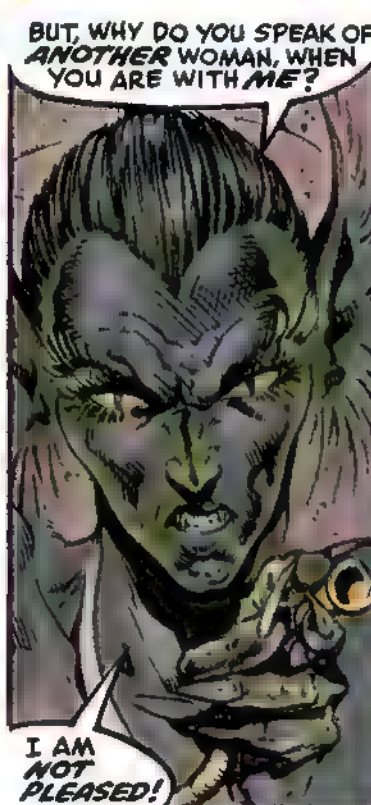


WHAT OF ALTHA? WHAT DID YOU DO TO HER?



SHE WILL *SERVE* ME, LIKE THE REST... TILL SHE *DISPLEASES* ME.

THEN, SHE WILL DIE.



BUT, WHY DO YOU SPEAK OF *ANOTHER* WOMAN, WHEN YOU ARE WITH *ME*?

I AM NOT PLEASED!



YOU DO NOT
BLENC?!?

"I laughed, then...and my
laughter thrummed with
blood-lust.

ARE YOU
MAD, TO
LAUGH?

O MAN,
WHEN
YASMEENA
IS WROTH,
BLOOD
FLOWS LIKE
WATER--

--AND
THE VERY
GODS
HIDE THEIR
HEADS IN
HORROR!

NO, THAT
WAS NOT
MIRTH, BUT
THE GROWL
OF A
HUNTING
BEAST.

YOU INTEREST ME,
ESAU CAIRN.

TAKE HIM
TO HIS
CHAMBER!

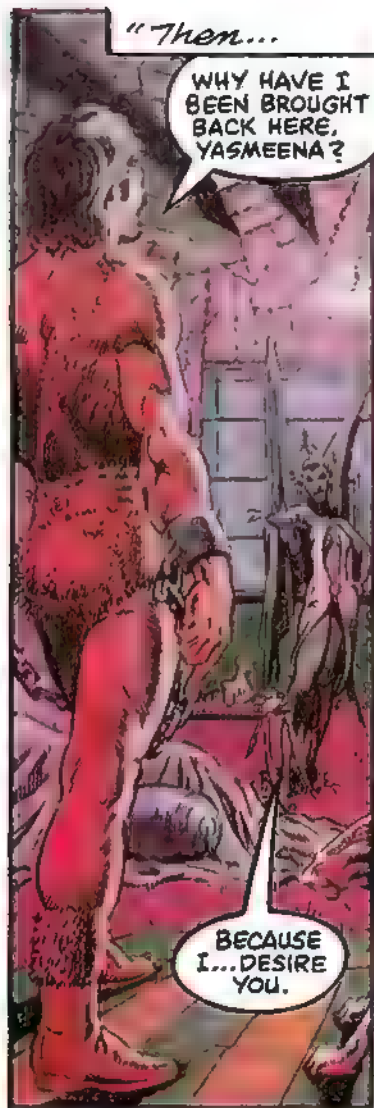
"And so I began my third
captivity on Almuric...

"...here in the black
citadel of Yugga, on the
rock Yuthla, by the river
of Yogh, in the land of
Yagg.

"I was bathed...

"...fed...

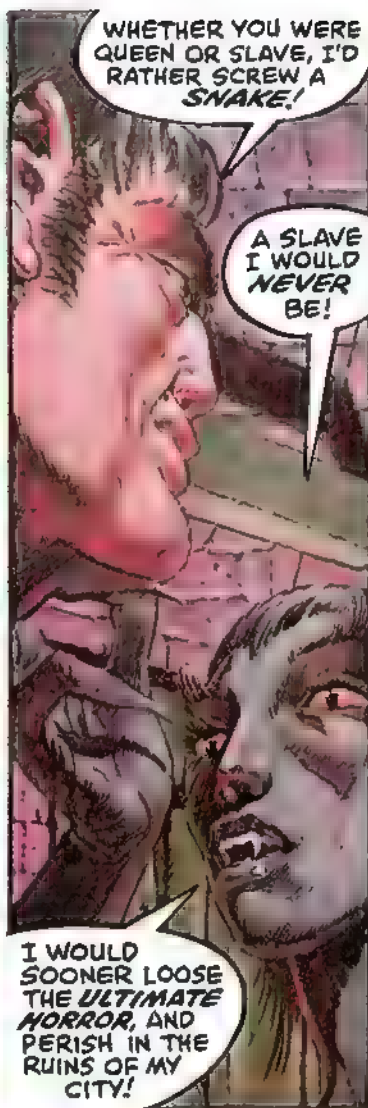
"...and
ultimately
...chained.



"Then..."

WHY HAVE I BEEN BROUGHT BACK HERE, YASMEENA?

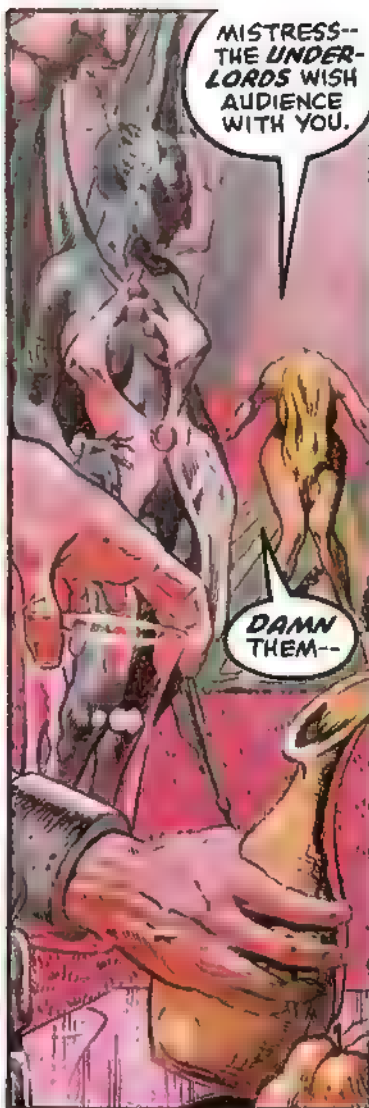
BECAUSE I... DESIRE YOU.



WHETHER YOU WERE QUEEN OR SLAVE, I'D RATHER SCREW A SNAKE!

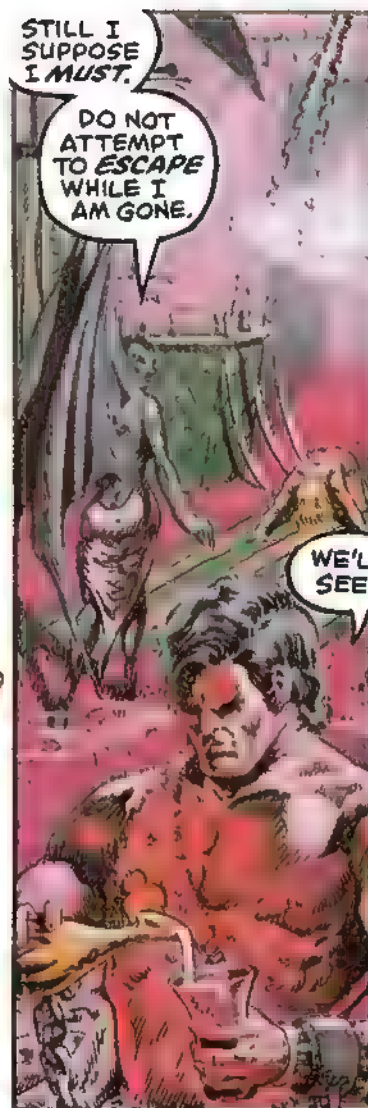
A SLAVE I WOULD NEVER BE!

I WOULD SOONER LOOSE THE ULTIMATE HORROR, AND PERISH IN THE RUINS OF MY CITY!



MISTRESS-- THE UNDERLORDS WISH AUDIENCE WITH YOU.

DAMN THEM--



STILL I SUPPOSE I MUST.

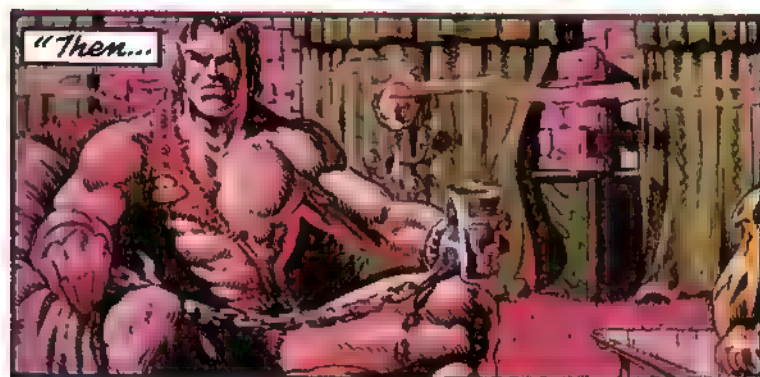
DO NOT ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE WHILE I AM GONE.

WE'LL SEE.

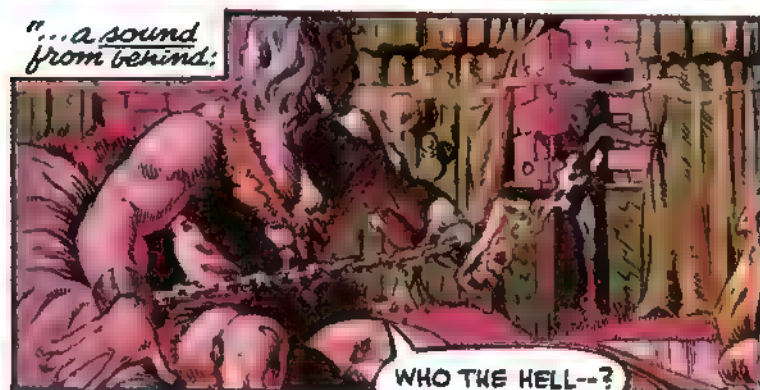


"Time passed."

"I drank."



"Then..."



"...a sound from behind:"

WHO THE HELL--?



YOU!? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE--

--IN THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER, IN PLAIN SIGHT OF THE SECRET DOOR TO THE TEMPLE?

SPEAK, PALE ONE,
OR I, LORD
GOTRAH, WILL--

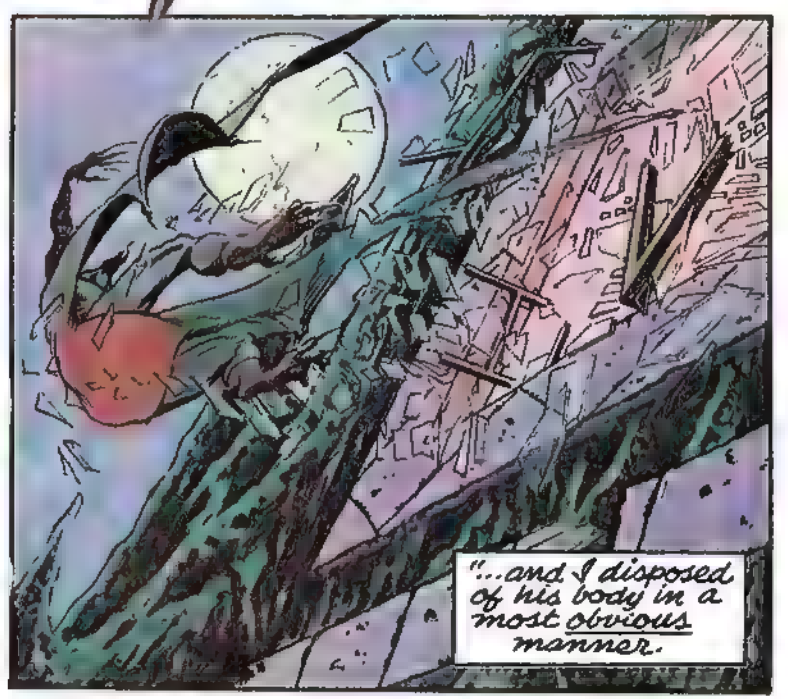


"He never
finished
his snarled
threat--"

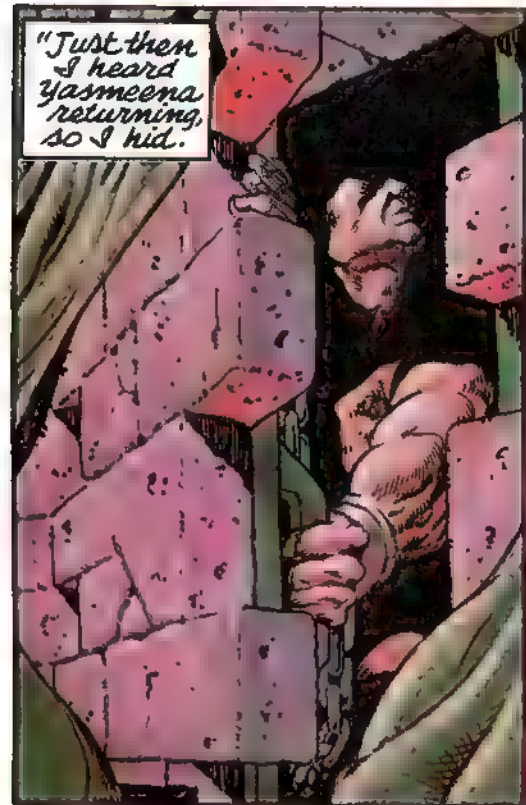
"...unless
Yagas believe
in an after-
life."



"Then, a mad plan
seized me by the
throat, even as I
had seized the
queen's vile major-
domo..."



"...and I disposed
of his body in a
most obvious
manner."



"Just then
I heard
Yasmeena
returning,
so I hid."



"From her outcry,
she thought I
had fallen to
my death..."

"...and she flew
out to find my
broken, rock-
torn form."



"Before
she found
Gotrah's
corpse, I
had places
to go."



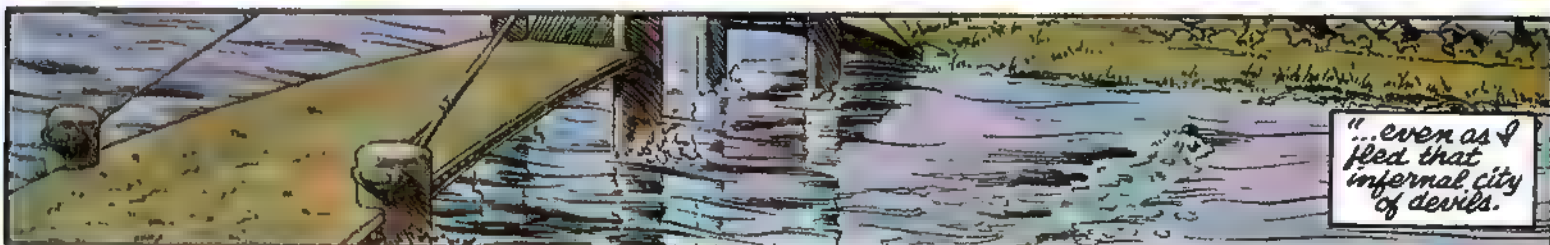
"The temple
Gotrah had
spoken of,
I reached
minutes later..."



"Obviously it was
there the slavish
Akkis worshipped..."



"...a fact I
knew I could
make use of..."



"...even as I
fled that
infernal city
of devils."

"Doubting
I could ever
escape on
foot, I still
had vowed
to die trying..."



"...when
I saw
I might
not have
to."



WHAT MADNESS
IS THIS?



AN
ESCAPED
SLAVE?

I
SHALL--



URCK

I'LL GIVE
THE ORDERS
NOW, DOG!



"Thus, amid the subtle glow of dawn,
we soon soared through the sky,
the Yaga and I...sweeping over
the rushing Purple River..."

"...and vanished from the land
of Yagg, into the blue mazes of
the northwest...!"



ALMURIC

CONCLUSION

ESAU CAIRN'S NARRATIVE

AS TRANSCRIBED FROM THE
DICTAPHONE JOURNAL
OF PROF. AVERY HILDEBRAND

"I had made it plain
to my Yaga captive
what he must do if he
wished to live... nor is
it the nature of a Yaga
to sacrifice himself
for his kind.

KEEP ON A
NORTHWARD
COURSE, YOU
BASTARD, OR I'LL
SHEATH THE GOTRAN'S
DAGGER IN YOUR
THROAT, AND WE'LL
BOTH DIE!

"And so, for four days
I drove that winged
devil unmercifully,
allowing him to rest
and eat only after
Almuric's sun had set.

ROYTHOMAS SCRIPT
TIM CONRAD ART
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY
ROBERT E. HOWARD

FROM PROF. HILDEBRAND'S
FOOTNOTES TO THE NARRA-
TIVE OF ESAU CAIRN:

It consistently amazed me, as I received Esau Cairn's mental messages from across the vast void of space, how much better his primitive instincts and mighty thews served him on the planet I call ALMUDIC than ever they did on his native EARTH.

Here, those attributes merely made him an outcast-- nay, a CRIMINAL after he was forced to kill the malignant Cancer known as "Boss" BLAINE.

Yet, on that other world, they enabled him to escape from YUGSA, that towering rock-fortress of the ebon-hearted YAGAS, and from its even more fearsome QUEEN YASMEENA.

Enabled him both to escape and to ENDOURE.

"Then, on the fourth day..."

FLY OVER THAT WAY, YAGA!

YES, I THOUGHT SO!

WE'RE OVER KOTH'S TERRITORY NOW...

...AND THERE'S AN ARMY OF KOTHANS MARCHING BELOW!

"My intense interest, however..."

"...almost proved my undoing!"

Y
Y
A
A



"He might have thrown me then, the devil..."



"...but I found something to grab onto."

RRRR



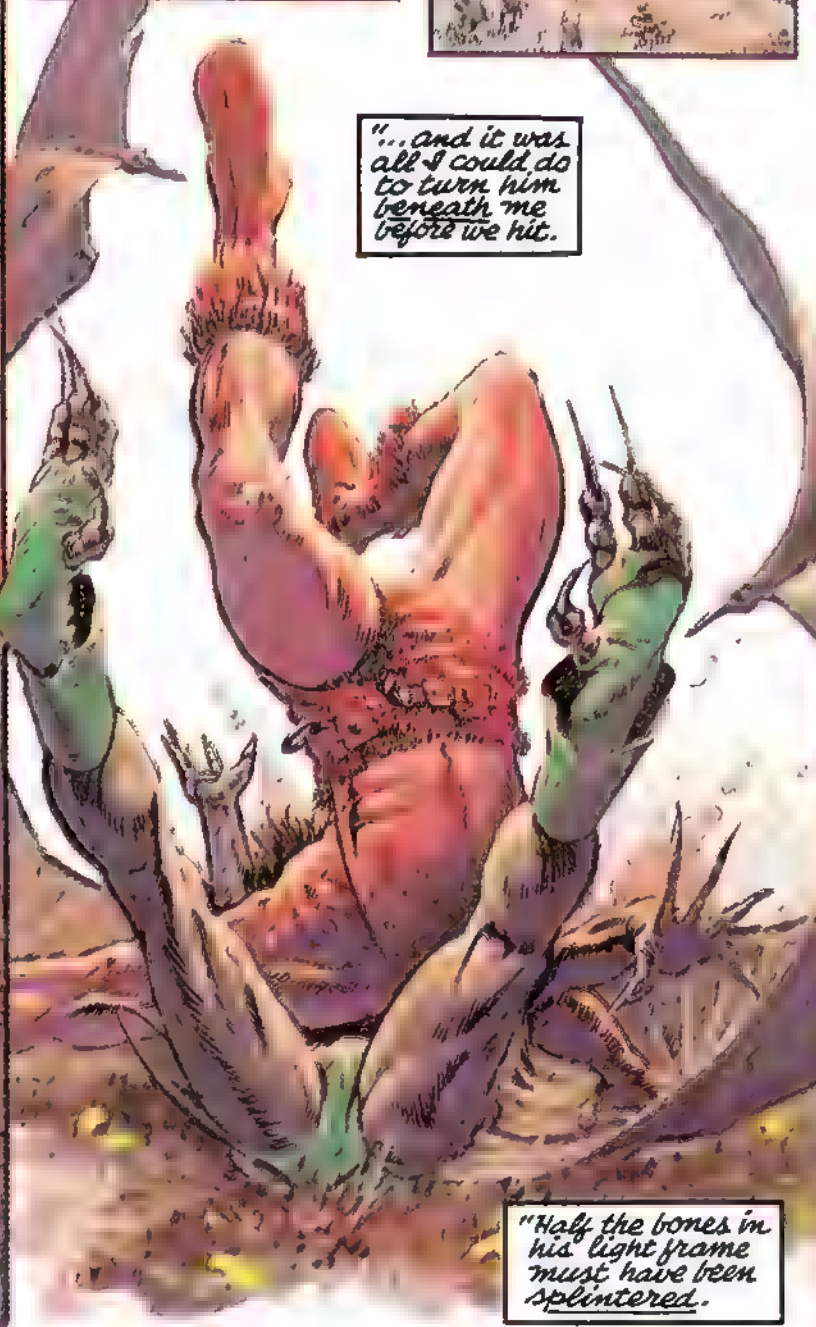
"He saw that our struggles were dragging us lower and lower toward the earth..."



"...so he made a final desperate effort..."



"But, at the same instant, I gave his head a terrific downward wrench..."



"...and it was all I could do to turn him beneath me before we hit."

"nor did he move, as I staggered to my feet."



IRONHAND!

BY THAK'S JAWBONES--IRONHAND!

"Half the bones in his light frame must have been splintered."

KOSSUTH SKULL-SPLITTER...?

AYE, AND IT'S GOOD
TO SEE YOU *ALIVE*,
BY HELL'S THUNDER!



WE FOUND YOUR
BROKEN WEAPON
WEEKS AGO, NEAR
ANOTHER DEAD
YAGA.

WERE YOU...
MARCHING
TO *FIND*
ME, THEN?



NO, IT'S THE *MEN OF KHOR*
WE GO AGAINST... BUT WHERE
HAVE YOU *BEEN*?

TO *YUGGA*,
STRONGHOLD
OF THE WINGED
ONES.

WHAT?



AYE... FOR *ALTHA*, DAUGHTER OF ZAL THE THROWER,
LANGUISHES IN THAT BLACK CITY.

AT THE FULLMOON,
SHE *DIES*-- WITH
500 OTHER HUMAN
WOMEN-- UNLESS
WE PREVENT IT!



"A murmur of mixed
wrath and *horror* swept
through the ranks...

NO ONE CAN
STOP THE
YAGAS!

LISTEN-- *FORGET* YOUR
BLOOD-FEUD WITH THE
CITY OF KHOR, AND
FOLLOW ME
TO *YUGGA*!

I KNOW YOU
FEAR THE
YAGAS, WHO
STRIKE FROM
THE SKIES--

BUT, IF YOU AND THE
MEN OF KHOR WILL
JOIN TOGETHER, I CAN
LEAD YOU INTO THEIR
VERY *CITADEL*!



THEY HAVE
PREYED UPON
US SINCE *TIME*
WAS NOT.



YOU'LL SOON HAVE
YOUR CHANCE TO SPEAK
WITH THE *MEN OF KHOR*
ABOUT IT, IRONHAND.

FOR--
THERE
THEY
COME!





NOW WHAT SAY YOU?

I SAY, I'LL GO TO MEET THEM--ALONE--

--UNARMED.



EH?



WHAT MADMAN IS THIS, WHO COMES WITH EMPTY HANDS INTO THE TEETH OF WAR?



I AM ESAU IRONHAND, OF THE TRIBE OF KNOTH...

...AND I WOULD PARLEY WITH BOTH YOU AND THE KOTHANS.

IN TRUTH, YOU'LL TELL YOUR LIES TO THE CLAW-BIRDS...



...THOUGH YOU'LL DO IT WITH YOUR THROAT WIDE-SLIT.

HOLD, BRAGI!



I SAW THIS MAN FIGHT A LONGTOOTH ONCE, AND SLAY IT.

IT IS OUR LAW TO HEAR OUT BRAVE MEN.

THEN WE'LL KILL HIM!



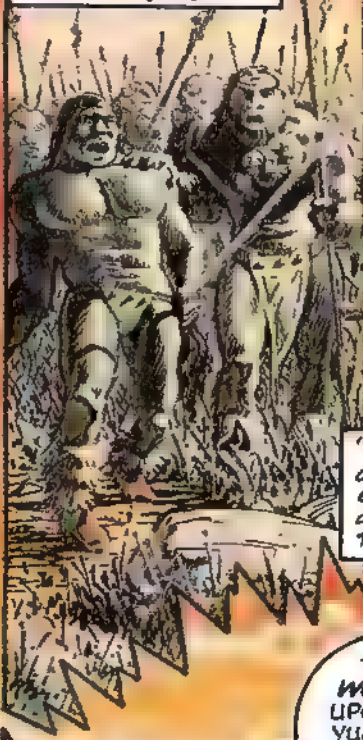
HEAR ME, BOTH YOU TRIBES! I HAVE BEEN A CAPTIVE AMONG THE YAGAS, IN THE LAND OF YAGG...

...WHERE MANY OF YOUR WIVES AND DAUGHTERS HAVE BEEN SPIRITED.

"I was no orator, and I stood alone against old hatreds that made all the man-cities of Almuric foes to every other."



"Still, they blanched when I told them bluntly of the hell that was Yugga."



"I told of young girls dying beneath the excesses of evon demons or dis-membered alive..."

THESE ARE YOUR WOMEN WHO SCREAM UPON THE RACKS OF YUGGA-- WHILE YOU PLAY AT WAR, AND CALL YOURSELVES MEN!

GO HOME, RATHER, AND DON THE SKIRTS OF WOMEN!

"...aye, and of torments which left the body unharmed, but sucked the mind empty of reason."



"First one, then another of the beast-men shed unfamiliar tears..."



"...so that, before I had finished, they were bellowing and beating their breasts with clenched fists..."



"...and it was in grief and fury that they wept!"



WE ARE MEN, ESAU IRONHAND!



LEAD US!

LEAD US!

"Southward we
marched... 4000
men of Koth, 5000
men of Khor... few
of us destined
to see our
homeland
again.



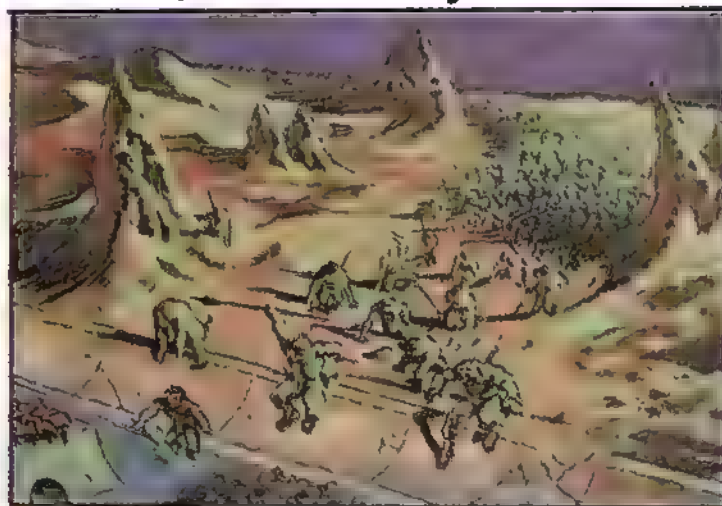
"Our pace was
swift, and we
lived off the
land.

"Still, I
chafed at
every mile,
altho fair
face ever
before me.

"Three weeks
later, we had
passed through
the forest beyond
which lay the
Purple River...



"I trusted... no, prayed... that the Yagos would
be too busy to see us coming...



"...too secure to
consider the possibility
that any foe would
attack from the
desert.



"and so I came again
to yugga, the black city.



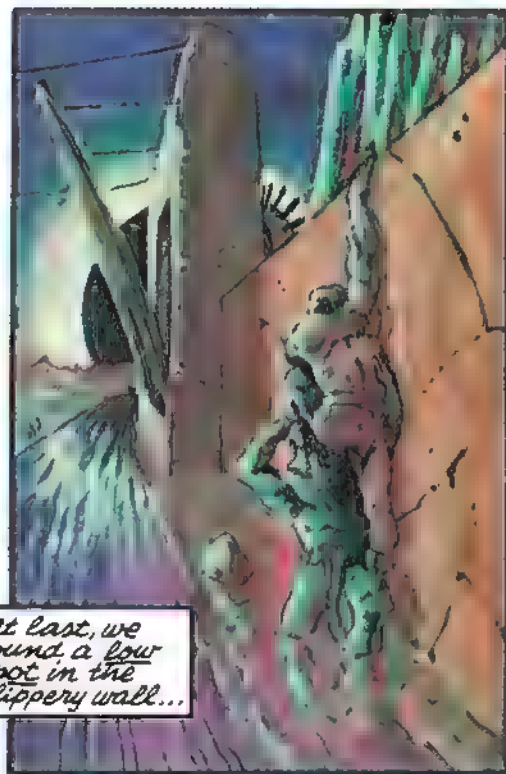
and the desert
that surrounds
the black rock
called yugga.



"Then, I spoke a quiet word to my friend, Thor the Bear...

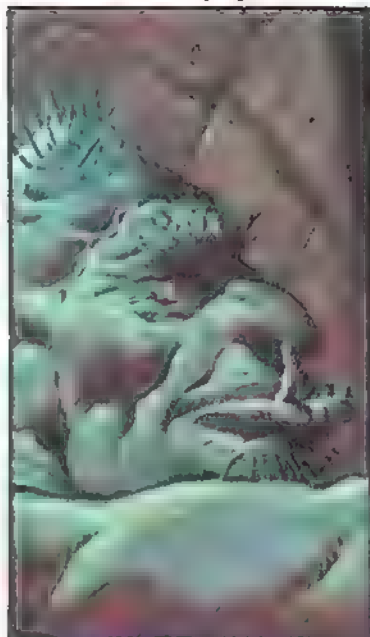


"and I slid into the waters of the Purple River, striking out for the further shore, he following."



"at last, we found a low spot in the slippery wall..."

"...upon which a sentry dozed, one of those wingless Aikis who served the Yagas..."



"...and I drew myself up."



"The watchman, however, had not slept so soundly as I had expected..."



"...so that, even as I gained the rampart..."



"...starlight gleamed from a lowered, rapidly moving spear."



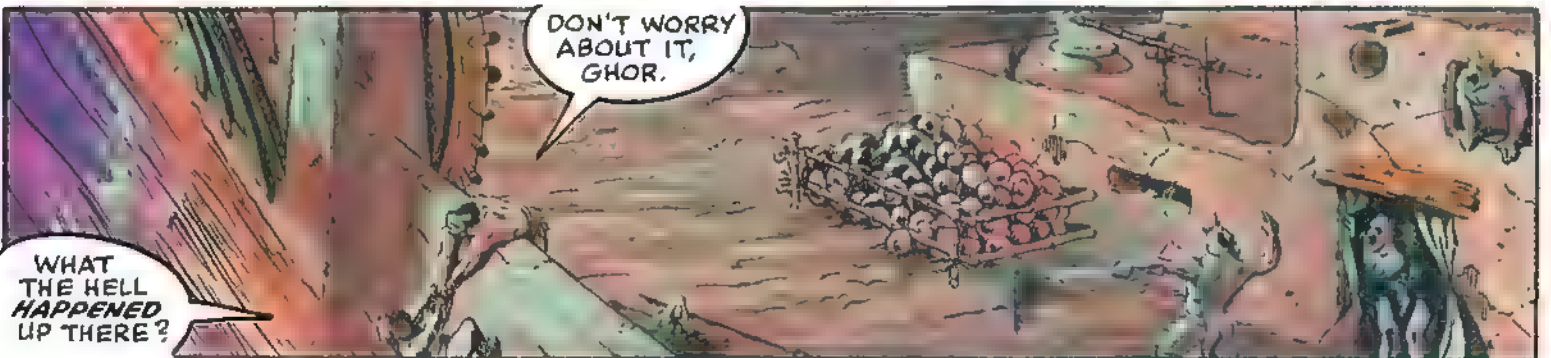


"My desperate effort to avoid his blow nearly toppled me backward off the wall..."



"...but all the same, it was I who lived to draw another breath."

AAAAAA

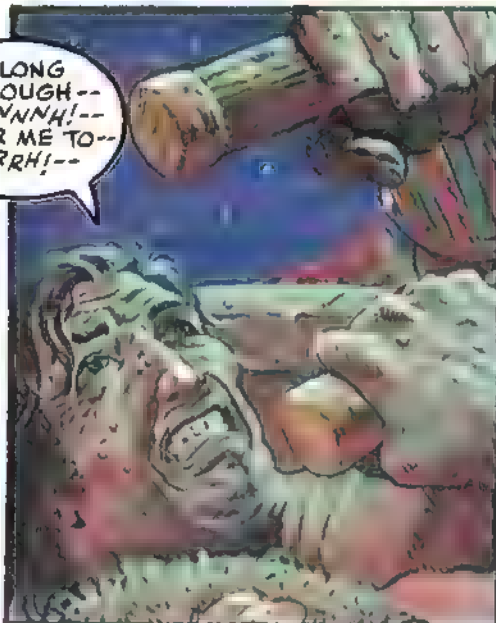


DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, GHOR.

WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED UP THERE?



JUST KEEP-- THOSE BASTARDS-- AWAY FROM ME--



--LONG ENOUGH-- UNNNH!-- FOR ME TO-- ARRH!--



IRONHAND! THERE'S TOO MANY OF THEM!

IT-- DOESN'T MATTER NOW--



THE GATE'S OPEN!



DAMN! ARROWS!

*"That meant the
waged. Venge were
striking for the
Akkia had no bows."*

**STRIKE,
MY WARRIORS!
LET THE MAD
BARBARIANS LEARN
THE PRICE OF
DARING TO
ATTACK
OUR CITADEL!**

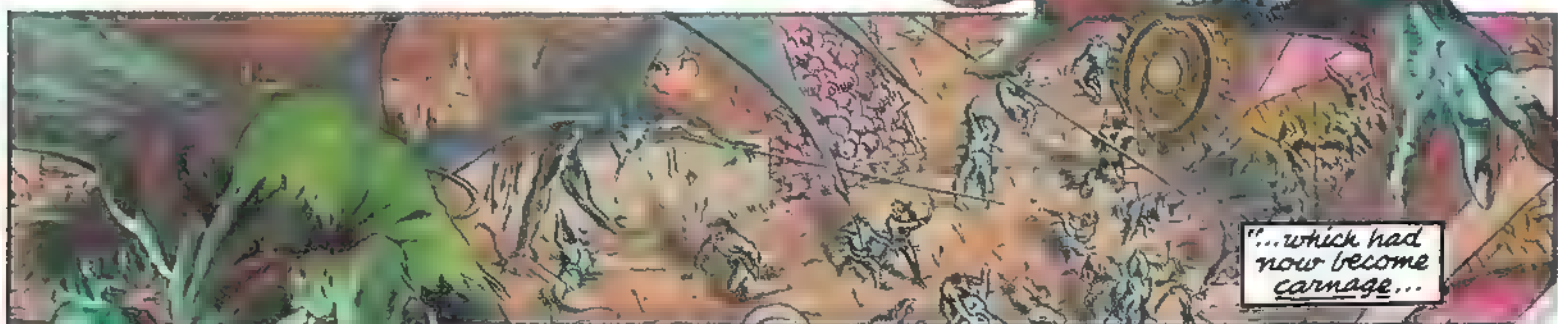
**NOW WE
FACE OUR TRUE
ENEMY... NOT
MERE SLAVES!**

**PUSH ON!
SHOW THOSE
FLYING SCUM
THE WRATH OF
MEN!**

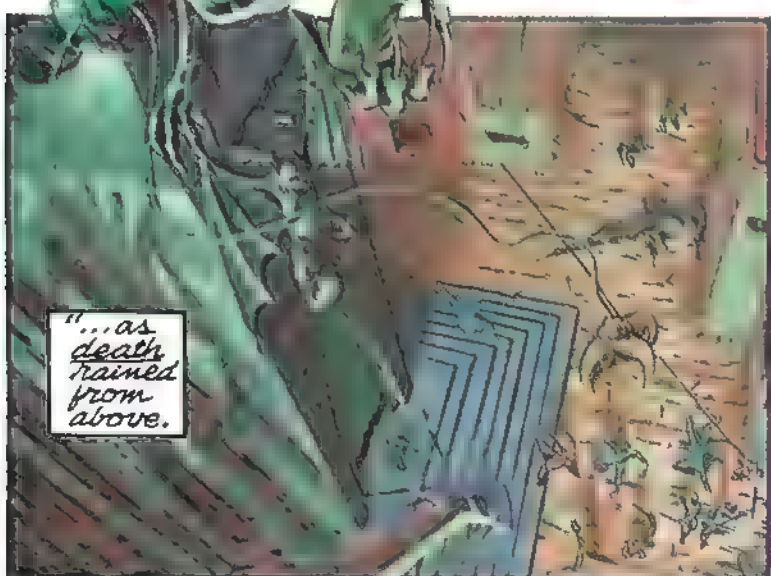
GERARD



"Brandishing
Totrah's dagger,
I leaped into
the fray..."



"...which had
now become
carnage..."

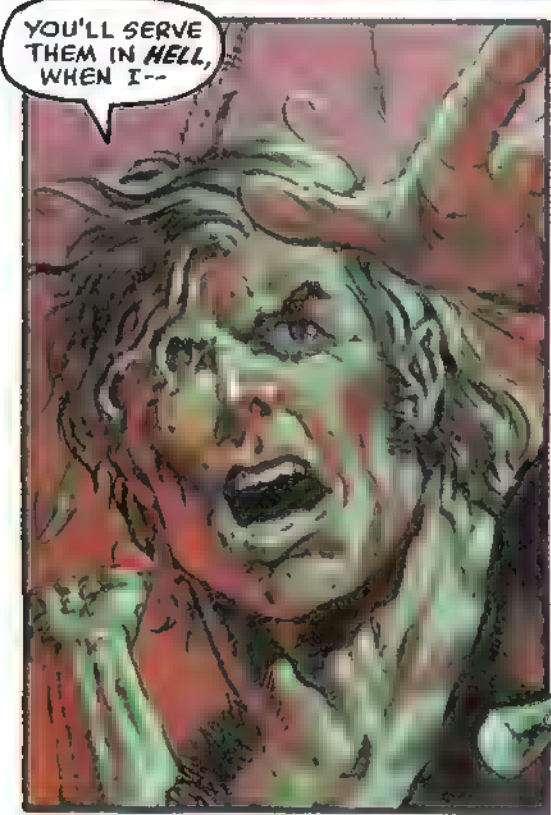


"...as
death
rained
from
above."

"Then, abruptly,
a blue face
loomed before
me..."

"YOU--AKKA!
I WANT YOUR
SWORD!"

"NO! I
SERVE THE
MASTERS!"



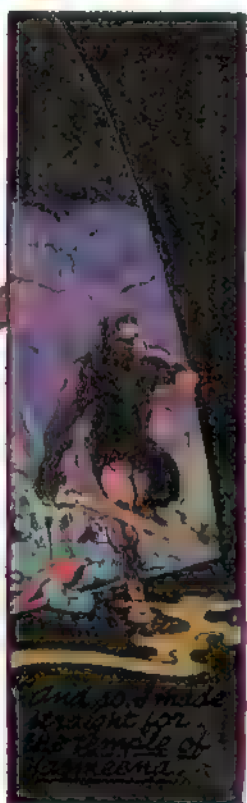
"YOU'LL SERVE
THEM IN HELL,
WHEN I--"



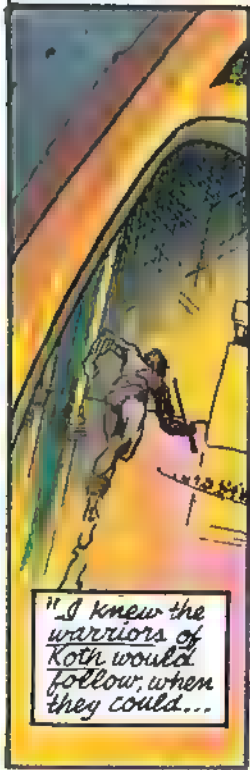
"I had spoken
more truly
than I knew..."



"But I
had my
sword..."



"and so, I made
straight for
the temple of
Carnage..."



"I knew the warriors of Koth would follow, when they could..."



"But, they had their hands full, at the moment..."



"...so I would do the best I could... alone."



"Then it was that I heard a familiar, hated voice..."

EAT, YAGAS! LET THE OTHERS TAKE CARE OF THOSE APE-THINGS.



"I knew I should have stayed hidden, playing for time... but my pounding pulse would not let me..."

WHERE IS ALTHA, YASMEENA?



YOU!?

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN--!

"And once again, I laughed that blood-lustful laugh Yasmeena had hated..."

"...as I stepped forward to die fighting."

WE STRIKE WITH ESAU IRONHAND!

"Then, suddenly... the men of Almiric were there, foaming like rabid dogs to come face to face with their long-despised foes!"

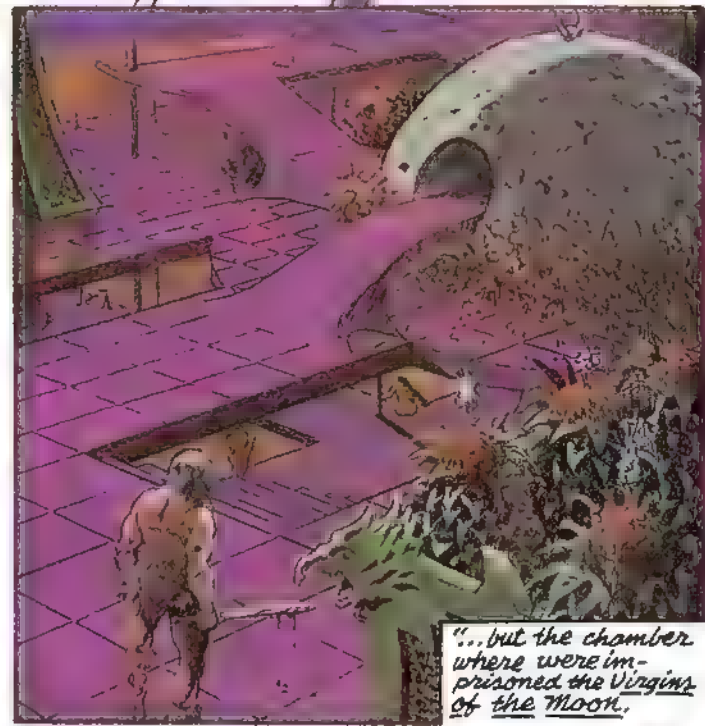
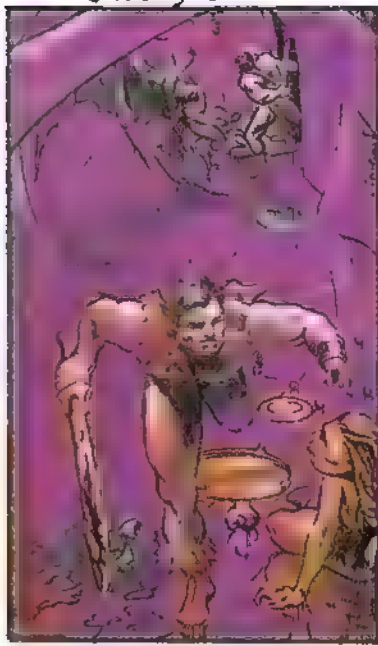


"But the empress of the ebou devils did not stop.

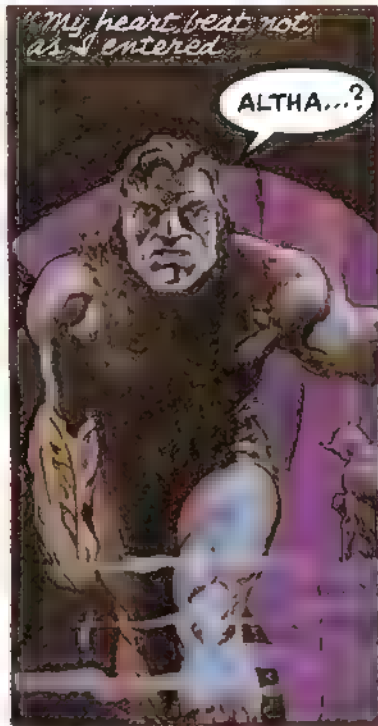
COME BACK, YASMEENA!

I WANT YOU, MY QUEEN!

"And for my part, it was not really yasmeena I sought...



"...but the chamber where were imprisoned the Virgins of the Moon.



"My heart beat not as I entered

ALTHA...?



"Then... she was there.

OH, ESAU-- ESAU!

I'VE COME TO TAKE YOU HOME, BELOVED.



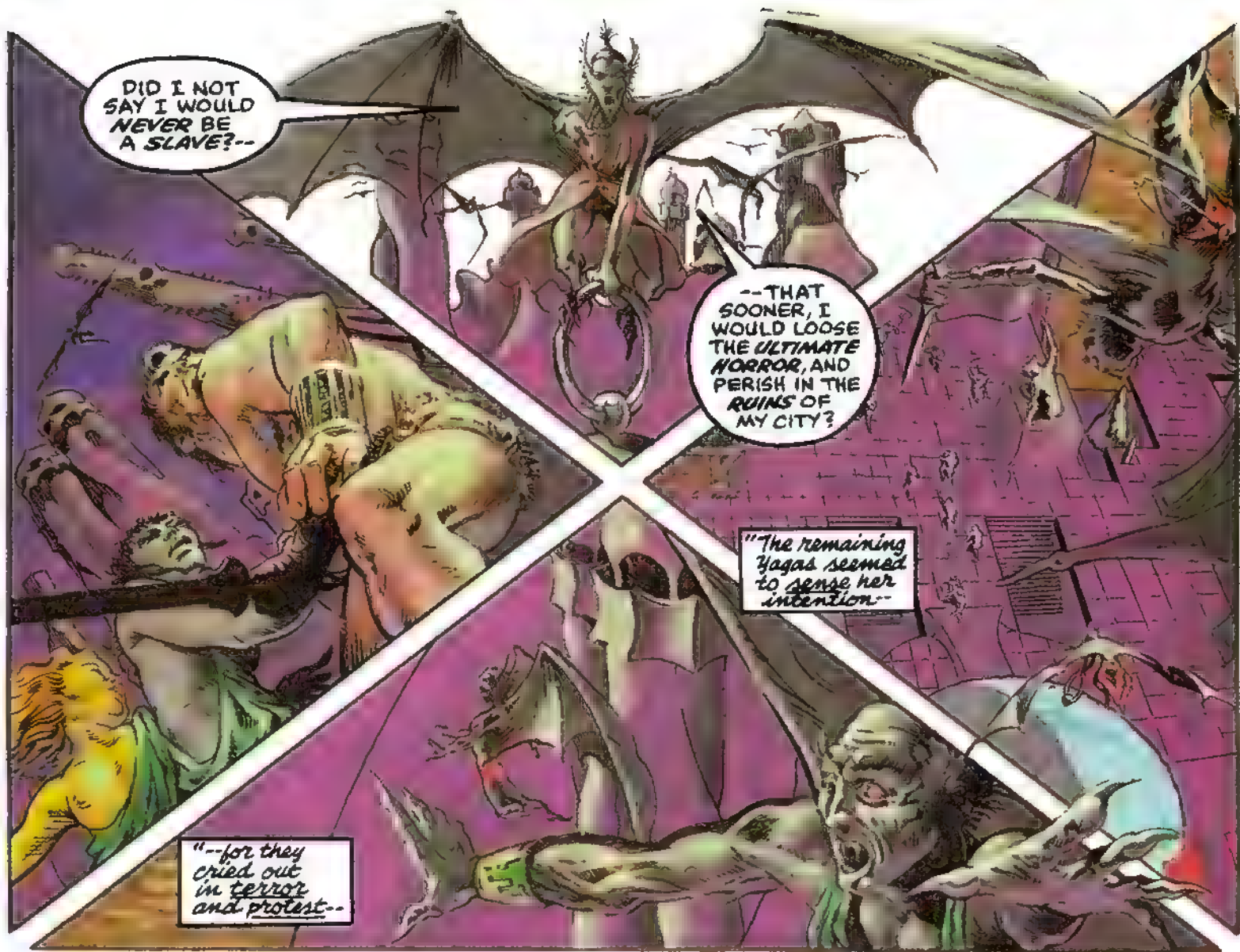
"yet, as we all fled...

"...the demoness called from above;



DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE CONQUERED, O FOOL?

YOU HAVE NOT!



DID I NOT
SAY I WOULD
NEVER BE
A SLAVE?--

--THAT
SOONER, I
WOULD LOOSE
THE ULTIMATE
HORROR, AND
PERISH IN THE
RUINS OF
MY CITY?

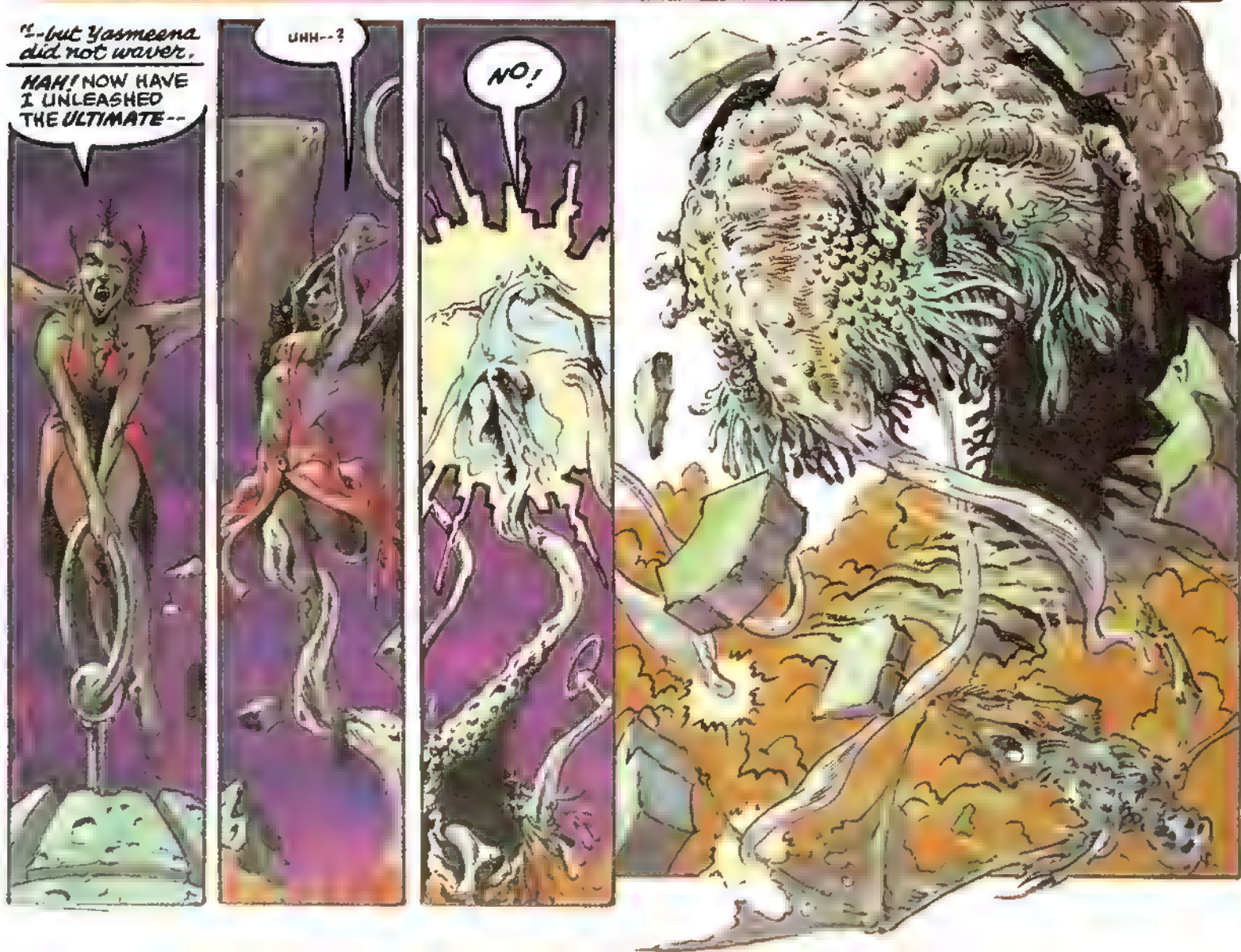
"The remaining
Yagas seemed
to sense her
intention--"

"--for they
cried out
in terror
and protest--"

"I--but Yasmeena
did not waver.
HAH! NOW HAVE
I UNLEASHED
THE ULTIMATE--"

UHH--?

NO!



"The thing that had emerged into the light of dawn was brainless, sightless... a senseless fury of death and destruction..."



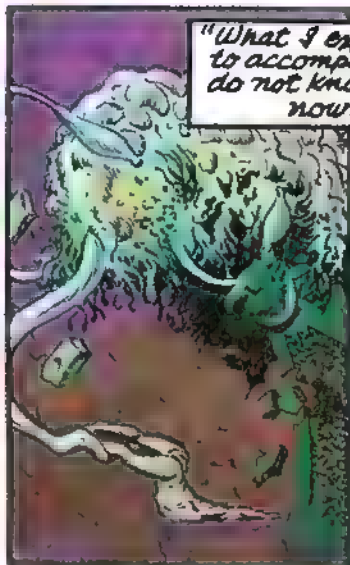
GHOR!
TAKE THE WOMEN BACK THROUGH THE SHAFT!

WHAT OF YOU, IRONHAND?

JUST GO, DAMN YOU!



"What I expected to accomplish, I do not know, even now..."



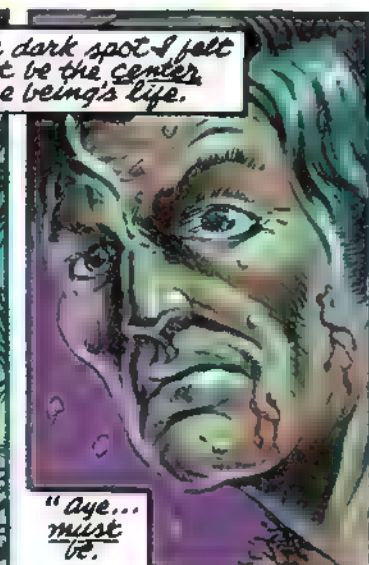
"Yet, in the middle of its vast body I had seen a dark spot pulsing..."



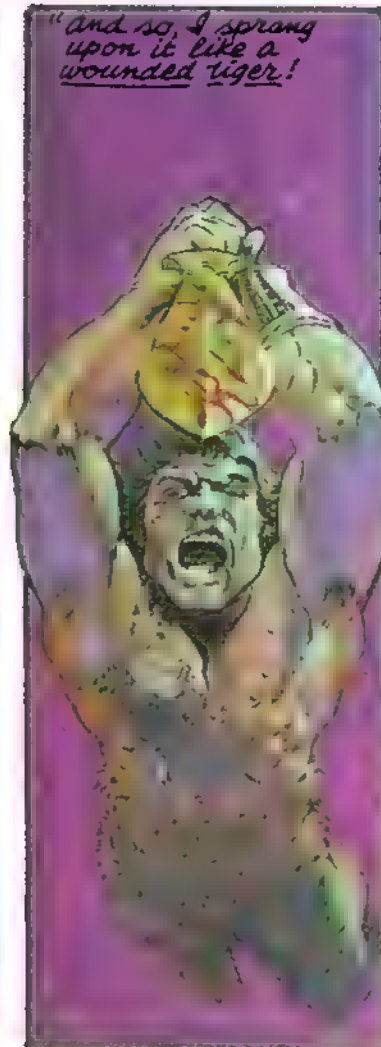
"...a dark spot I felt must be the center of the being's life."



"Aye... must be."



"and so, I sprang upon it like a wounded tiger!"



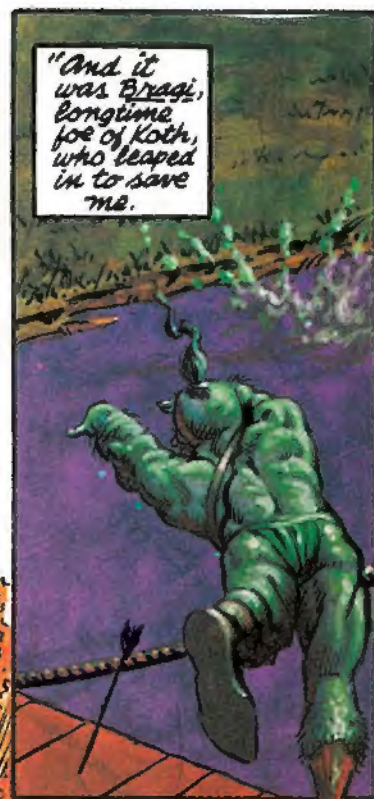
"They say that, the instant my sword sank into the fire-slug, both it and I were enveloped in a blinding flame--"

"-- and my body was hurled, far out over the cliff..."





...to fall five hundred feet into the deep blue waters of the river Yogh.



"And it was Bragi, longtime foe of Koth, who leaped in to save me."



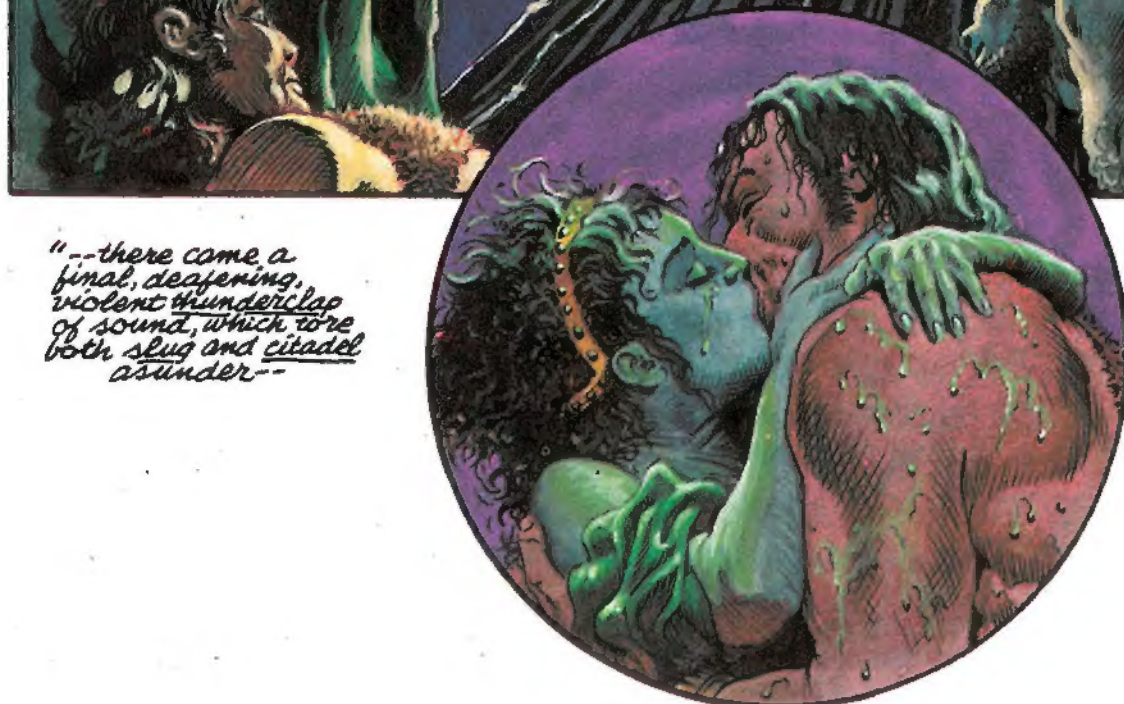
IS HE--?

HE LIVES, GIRL--THOUGH NOW, I KNOW NOT!



ESAU--

"Then, even as I saw her seem to float above me--"



"--there came a final, deafening, violent thunderclap of sound, which tore both slug and citadel asunder--"

"--and the grim city of Yuaga, on the rock Yuthla, in the land of Yegg... was no more."

AFTERWORD

And Now, Live From the Planet Almuric...

by Roy Thomas

A son of Texas named Robert E. Howard (1906-1936) was one of the foremost fantasy writers of the twentieth century.

Originally influenced by authors as diverse as H.P. Lovecraft, Rafael Sabatini, Talbot Mundy, and Edgar Rice Burroughs, he wrote a mountain of exciting stories for the colorfully lurid pulp magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, most especially for the legendary *Weird Tales*.

The most notable of his accomplishments, of course, is his virtual creation of the genre now known as "sword-and-sorcery," as a playground for his heroes such as Solomon Kane, Bran Mak Morn, King Kull — and eventually the most famous of them all, Conan the Cimmerian.

Howard seems to have invented his particular amalgam of heroism and horror because he wanted to write swashbuckling tales in the mold of Sabatini (author of *Captain Blood*, et al.); but his primary market — *Weird Tales* — insisted upon an element of the supernatural in stories it purchased. Howard's heroic creations satisfied both criteria, and he soon became one of the magazine's most popular authors, right up there with Lovecraft himself.

Sometimes in the 1930s, Howard also delved, once and once only, into writing a story to rival the influential Martian "scientific romances" of Edgar Rice Burroughs, which had caused a mild literary sensation two decades earlier, and which were still being published (and imitated) with some regularity in the 1930s.

The resultant short novel was *Almuric*, named after the far-flung planet to which its protagonist, Esau Cairn, journeys.

Naturally, however, Howard being Howard, his hero was less like ERB's ultra-gallant John Carter of Mars, and more like a 1930s version of the barbarous Conan — rough-hewn and a veritable physical superman, able to best most human and non-human foes without having to rely (as Carter did) on the lighter gravity of his adopted world to give him superhuman prowess.

Just when *Almuric* was written is far from certain. L. Sprague de Camp, in his Howard biography *Dark Valley Destiny*, assumes that it was written in 1936. Glenn Lord, literary agent for the REH estate, suspects rather that Howard wrote it circa 1934, at which time he mentions in a letter that he was working on a "science fiction" novel. If this was not *Almuric*, it's hard to imagine what he could have been referring to — even though *Almuric* is no more "science fiction" than a *Princess of Mars* itself ever was.

In any event, the novel itself lay unpublished, even unsubmitted, when Howard committed suicide in 1936 at the age of thirty. According to Lord, Howard's agent Otis Albert Kline (himself a popular writer of tales in the vein of Burroughs' Mars/Barsoom) cobbled together two items he found among Howard's papers: a completed draft of the book and the first half of an incomplete second draft. These he edited into final form,

and the result was *Almuric* — a name probably given it by Kline, or else by *Weird Tales* editor Farnsworth Wright.

Almuric appeared as a three-part serial in the May, June-July, and August 1939 issues of *WT*. Since then it has been published at various times in paperback form, beginning with Ace Books in 1964.

In the late 1970's, having achieved some success in bringing such Howard heroes as Conan, Kull Kane, Bran, Red Sonya/Sonja, et al. into the pages of Marvel Comics, I felt it was finally time to take a stab at the Texas fantasist's one attempt at interplanetary derring-do.

As editor, as well as writer, of Marvel's REH material, I was fortunate to have the choice of artist. I looked immediately to a young talent named Tim Conrad. By sheer coincidence, I had recently collaborated with Tim to adapt for Marvel one of the John Carter pastiches written by none other than Otis Albert Kline, the very writer who, turning agent, later sold *Almuric*!

Talk about coming full circle!

Tim and I began our adaptation as a comic-book "mini-series," with four 17-page chapters (the then-current length of a Marvel issue). Along the way, we made a few alterations in the story. In retrospect, the most regrettable change to me is losing that period when Cairn, finding himself on a strange new world, spends months merely surviving, while gradually building himself up into a physical specimen even stronger than he had been on earth; we also made it appear as if Queen Yasmeeela were definitely killed at the end, while REH himself had never mentioned Yasmeeela again after she unleashed the so-called "Ultimate Horror" upon her attackers.

Tim and I also made one decision I've never regretted — namely, to print the early, earth-set pages of the story in black-white-and-grey tones, like most movies of the period when it was written.

The planned comic book was advertised by Marvel as *Warrior of the Lost Planet*, since the name "Almuric" meant little to comics readers. However, the decision was soon made to publish the four installments instead in Marvel's new slick-paper comics magazine, *Epic Illustrated*, edited by Archie Goodwin.

Tim and I were delighted, for that meant better paper and printing, plus the opportunity for Tim to do far more with the coloring, which he wished to handle himself. A drawing which Tim had intended as the cover of the first issue of the comic book was sandwiched into Chapter I as a story page, and the end product was printed in *Epic Illustrated* #2-5 in 1980.

(Special thanks are owed to Marvel V.P. Michael Hobson and to Marvel Entertainment Group, for providing Dark Horse with the color proofs as a gesture of good will, since Marvel's own rights in *Almuric* had expired.)

And now, following its publication of the two REH-based series *Cormac Mac Art* and *Kings of the Night*, Dark Horse is presenting *Almuric* for the first time ever in its entirety in a single volume, complete with a striking new cover by Tim Conrad — to be followed in short order by a four-issue Dark Horse comics series, *Ironhand of Almuric*, with covers by Conrad, interior art by talented newcomer Mark Winchell, and story by Roy and Dann Thomas — a sequel to the graphic novel you now hold in your hands.

We'd like to think that Robert E. Howard would enjoy it.

